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FROM THE FUND OF

HARRIET J. G. DENNY

OF BOSTON

THE TRAGIC MUSE

BY

HENRY JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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THE TRAGIC MUSE.

XXIII.

It was certainly singular, under the circumstances, that on sitting down in his studio, after Julia had left town, Nick Dormer should not, as regards the effort to reproduce some beautiful form, have felt more chilled by the absence of a friend who was such an embodiment of beauty. She was away, and he longed for her, and yet without her the place was more filled with what he wanted to find in it. He turned into it with confused feelings, the most definite of which was a sense of release and recreation. It looked blighted and lonely and dusty, and his old studies, as he rummaged them out, struck him as even clumsier than the last time he had ventured to drop his eyes upon them. But amid this neglected litter, in the colorless and obstructed light of a high north window which needed washing, he tasted more sharply the possibility of positive happiness: it appeared to him that, as he had said to Julia, he was more in possession of his soul. It was frivolity and folly, it was

puerility to spend valuable hours pottering over the vain implements of an art he had relinquished; and a certain shame that he had felt in presenting his plea to Julia Dallow that Sunday night arose from the sense not of what he clung to, but of what he had given up. He had turned his back upon serious work, so that pottering was now all he could aspire to. It could n't be fruitful, it could n't be anything but ridiculous, almost ignoble; but it soothed his nerves, it was in the nature of a secret dissipation. He had never suspected that he should ever have, on his own part, nerves to count with; but this possibility had been revealed to him on the day it became clear that he was letting something precious go. He was glad he had not to justify himself to the critical, for this might have been a delicate business. The critical were mostly absent; and besides, shut up all day in his studio, how should he ever meet them? It was the place in the world where he felt furthest away from his constituents. That was a part of the pleasure — the consciousness that for the hour the coast was clear and his mind was free. His mother and his sister had gone to Broadwood: Lady Agnes (the phrase sounds brutal, but it represents his state of mind) was well out of the way. He had written to her as soon as Julia left town — he had apprised her of the fact that his wedding-day was fixed: a relief, for poor Lady Agnes, to a period of intolerable mystification, of taciturn wondering

and watching. She had said her say the day of the poll at Harsh; she was too proud to ask and too discreet to "nag;" so she could only wait for something that did n't arrive. The unconditioned loan of Broadwood had of course been something of a bribe to patience: she had at first felt that on the day she should take possession of that capital house Julia would indeed seem to have come into the family. But the gift had confirmed expectations just enough to make disappointment more bitter; and the discomfort was greater in proportion as Lady Agnes failed to discover what was the matter. Her daughter Grace was much occupied with this question, and brought it up in conversation, in a manner irritating to her ladyship, who had a high theory of being silent about it, but who, however, in the long run, was more unhappy when, in consequence of a reprimand, the girl suggested no reasons at all than when she suggested stupid ones. It eased Lady Agnes a little to discuss the mystery, when she could have the air of not having begun.

The letter Nick received from her the first day of Passion Week, in reply to his important communication, was the only one he read at that moment; not counting, of course, several notes that Mrs. Dallow addressed to him from Griffin. There were letters piled up, as he knew, in Calcutta Gardens, which his servant had strict orders not to bring to the studio. Nick slept now in the

bedroom attached to this retreat; got things, as he wanted them, from Calcutta Gardens; and dined at his club, where a stray surviving friend or two, seeing him prowl about the library in the evening, was free to suppose that such eccentricity had a subtly political basis. When he thought of his neglected letters he remembered Mr. Carteret's convictions on the subject of not "getting behind;" they made him laugh, in the slightly sonorous painting-room, as he bent over one of the old canvases that he had ventured to turn to the light. He was fully determined, however, to master his correspondence before going down, the last thing before Parliament should reassemble, to spend another day at Beauclere. Mastering his correspondence meant, in Nick's mind, breaking open envelopes; writing answers was scarcely involved in the idea. But Mr. Carteret would never guess that. Nick was not moved even to write to him that the affair with Mrs. Dallow was on the point of taking the form he had been so good as to desire: he reserved the pleasure of this announcement for a personal interview.

The day before Good Friday, in the morning, his stillness was broken by a rat-tat-tat on the outer door of his studio, administered apparently by the knob of a walking-stick. His servant was out, and he went to the door, wondering who his visitor could be, at such a time, especially of the familiar class. The class was indicated by the

visitor's failure to look for the bell; for there was a bell, though it required a little research. In a moment the mystery was solved: the gentleman who stood smiling at him from the threshold could only be Gabriel Nash. Dormer had not seen this whimsical personage for several months, and had had no news of him beyond the general intimation that he was abroad. His old friend had sufficiently prepared him, at the time of their reunion in Paris, for the idea of the fitful in intercourse; and he had not been ignorant, on his return from Paris, that he should have had an opportunity to miss him if he had not been too busy to take advantage of it. In London, after the episode at Harsh, Gabriel had not reappeared: he had redeemed none of the pledges given the night they walked together to Notre Dame and conversed on important matters. He was to have interposed in Nick's destiny, but he had not interposed; he was to have dragged him in the opposite sense from Mrs. Dallow, but there had been no dragging; he was to have saved him, as he called it, and yet Nick was lost. This circumstance, indeed, constituted his excuse: the member for Harsh had rushed so to perdition. Nick had, for the hour, seriously wished to keep hold of him: he valued him as a salutary influence. Yet when he came to his senses, after his election, our young man had recognized that Nash might very well have reflected on the thanklessness of such a slippery subject — might have

considered that he was released from his vows. Of course it had been particularly in the event of a Liberal triumph that he had threatened to make himself felt; the effect of a brand plucked from the burning would be so much greater if the flames were already high. Yet Nick had not held him to the letter of this pledge, and had so fully admitted the right of a properly constituted æsthete to lose patience with him that he was now far from greeting his visitor with a reproach. He felt much more thrown on his defense.

Gabriel did not attack him, however. He brought in only blandness and benevolence and a great content at having obeyed the mystic voice — it was really a remarkable case of second sight — which had whispered to him that the recreant comrade of his prime was in town. He had just come back from Sicily, after a southern winter, according to a custom frequent with him, and had been moved by a miraculous prescience, unfavorable as the moment might seem, to go and ask for Nick in Calcutta Gardens, where he had extracted from his friend's servant an address not known to all the world. He showed Nick what a mistake it had been to fear a reproach from Gabriel Nash, and how he habitually ignored all lapses and kept up the standard only by taking a hundred fine things for granted. He also abounded more than ever in his own sense, reminding his friend how no recollection of him,

no evocation of him in absence, could do him justice. You could n't recall him without seeming to exaggerate him, and then recognized, when you saw him, that your exaggeration had fallen short. He emerged out of vagueness (his Sicily might have been the Sicily of "A Winter's Tale"), and would evidently be reabsorbed in it; but his presence was positive and pervasive enough. He was very lively while he lasted. His connections were with beauty, urbanity and conversation, as usual, but it was a circle you could n't find in the Court Guide. Nick had a sense that he knew "a lot of æsthetic people," but he dealt in ideas much more than in names and addresses. He was genial and jocose, sunburnt and romantically allusive. Nick gathered that he had been living for many days in a Saracenic tower, where his principal occupation was to watch for the flushing of the west. He had retained all the serenity of his opinions, and made light, with a candor of which the only defect was apparently that it was not quite enough a conscious virtue, of many of the objects of common esteem. When Nick asked him what he had been doing he replied, "Oh, living, you know;" and the tone of the words seemed to offer them as a record of magnificent success. He made a long visit, staying to luncheon and after luncheon, so that the little studio heard, all at once, more conversation, and of a wider scope, than in the several previous years of its history. With much

of our story left to tell, it is a pity that so little of this rich colloquy may be transcribed here; because, as affairs took their course, it marked really (if it be a question of noting the exact point) a turn of the tide in Nick Dormer's personal situation. He was destined to remember the accent with which Nash exclaimed, on his drawing forth sundry specimens of amateurish earnestness, "I say — I say — I say!"

Nick glanced round, with a heightened color. "They are pretty bad, eh?"

"Oh, you 're a deep one," Nash went on.

"What 's the matter?"

"Do you call your conduct that of a man of honor?"

"Scarcely, perhaps. But when no one has seen them!"

"That 's your villainy. C'est de l'exquis, du pur exquis. Come, my dear fellow, this is very serious — it 's a bad business," said Gabriel Nash. Then he added, almost with austerity: "You 'll be so good as to place before me every patch of paint, every sketch and scrap, that this room contains."

Nick complied, in great good-humor. He turned out his boxes and drawers, shoveled forth the contents of bulging portfolios, mounted on chairs to unhook old canvases that had been severely "skied." He was modest and docile and patient and amused, and above all quite thrilled — thrilled with the idea of eliciting a

note of appreciation so late in the day. It was the oddest thing how, at present, in fact, he found himself attributing value to Gabriel Nash — attributing to him, among attributions more confused, the dignity of judgment, the authority of intelligence. Nash was an ambiguous being, but he was an excellent touchstone. The two said very little for a while, and they had almost half an hour's silence, during which, after Nick had hastily improvised a little exhibition, there was only a puffing of cigarettes. The visitor walked about, looking at this and that, taking up rough studies and laying them down, asking a question of fact, fishing with his umbrella, on the floor, amid a pile of unarranged sketches. Nick accepted, jocosely, the attitude of suspense, but there was even more of it in his heart than in his face. So few people had seen his young work — almost no one who really counted. He had been ashamed of it, never showing it, to bring on a conclusion, inasmuch as it was precisely of a conclusion that he was afraid. He whistled now while he let his companion take time. He rubbed old panels with his sleeve and dabbed wet sponges on surfaces that had sunk. It was a long time since he had felt so gay, strange as such an assertion sounds in regard to a young man whose bridal-day had, at his urgent solicitation, lately been fixed. He had stayed in town to be alone with his imagination, and suddenly, paradoxically, the sense of that result had arrived with Gabriel Nash.

"Nicholas Dormer," this personage remarked at last, "for grossness of immorality I think I have never seen your equal."

"That sounds so well that I hesitate to risk spoiling it by wishing it explained."

"Don't you recognize in *any* degree the elevated idea of duty?"

"If I don't grasp it with a certain firmness I am a great failure, for I was quite brought up in it," Nick said.

"Then you are the wretchedest failure I know. Life *is* ugly, after all."

"Do I gather that you yourself recognize obligations of the order you allude to?" asked Nick.

"Do you 'gather'?" Nash stared. "Why, are n't they the very flame of my faith, the burden of my song?"

"My dear fellow, duty is doing, and I inferred that you think rather poorly of doing — that it spoils one's style."

"Doing wrong, assuredly."

"But what do you call right? What 's your canon of certainty there?"

"The conscience that 's in us — that charming, conversible, infinite thing, the intensest thing we know. But you must treat the oracle civilly if you wish to make it speak. You must n't stride into the temple in muddy jack-boots, with your hat on your head, as the Puritan troopers tramped into the dear old abbeys. One must do one's best to find out the right, and your crimi-

nality appears to be that you have not taken common trouble."

"I had n't you to ask," smiled Nick. "But duty strikes me as doing something. If you are too afraid it may be the wrong thing, you may let everything go."

"Being is doing, and if doing is duty, being is duty. Do you follow?"

"At a great distance."

"To be what one *may* be, really and efficaciously," Nash went on, "to feel it and understand it, to accept it, adopt it, embrace it — that 's conduct, that 's life."

"And suppose one 's a brute or an ass, where 's the efficacy?"

"In one's very want of intelligence. In such cases one is out of it — the question does n't exist; one simply becomes a part of the duty of others. The brute, the ass, neither feels, nor understands, nor accepts, nor adopts. Those fine processes in themselves classify us. They educate, they exalt, they preserve; so that, to profit by them, we must be as perceptive as we can. We must recognize our particular form, the instrument that each of us — each of us who carries anything — carries in his being. Mastering this instrument, learning to play it in perfection — that 's what I call duty, what I call conduct, what I call success."

Nick listened with friendly attention, and the air of general assent was in his face as he said: "Every one has it, then, this individual pipe?"

"'Every one,' my dear fellow, is too much to say, for the world is full of the crudest *remplissage*. The book of life is padded, ah but padded — a deplorable want of editing. I speak of every one that is any one. Of course there are pipes and pipes — little quavering flutes for the concerted movements and big *cornets-à-piston* for the great solos."

"I see, I see. And what might your instrument be?"

Nash hesitated not a moment; his answer was radiantly ready. "To speak to people just as I am speaking to you. To prevent, for instance, a great wrong being done."

"A great wrong?"

"Yes — to the human race. I talk — I talk; I say the things that other people don't, that they can't, that they won't," Gabriel continued, with his inimitable candor.

"If it 's a question of mastery and perfection, you certainly have them," his companion replied.

"And you have n't, alas; that 's the pity of it, that 's the scandal. That 's the wrong I want to set right, before it becomes too public a shame. I called you just now grossly immoral, on account of the spectacle you present — a spectacle to be hidden from the eye of ingenuous youth: that of a man neglecting his own fiddle to blunder away on that of one of his fellows. We can't afford such mistakes, we can't tolerate such license."

"You think, then, I *have* a fiddle?" asked Nick.

"A regular Stradivarius! All these things you have shown me are singularly interesting. You have a talent of a wonderfully pure strain."

"I say — I say — I say!" Nick exclaimed, standing in front of his visitor with his hands in his pockets and a blush on his smiling face, and repeating, with a change of accent, Nash's exclamation of half an hour before.

"I like it, your talent; I measure it, I appreciate it, I insist upon it," Nash went on, between the whiffs of his cigarette. "I have to be accomplished to do so, but fortunately I am. In such a case that 's my duty. I shall make you my business for a while. Therefore," Nash added, piously, "don't say I 'm unconscious of the moral law."

"A Stradivarius?" said Nick, interrogatively, with his eyes wide open, and the thought in his mind of how different this was from having gone to Griffin.

XXIV.

GABRIEL NASH had plenty of further opportunity to elucidate this and other figurative remarks, for he not only spent several of the middle hours of the day with his friend, but came back with him in the evening (they dined together at a little foreign pothouse in Soho, revealed to Nick on this occasion) and discussed the great question far into the night. The great question was whether, on the showing of those examples of his ability with which the room in which they sat was now densely bestrewn, Nick Dormer would be justified in "really going in" for the practice of pictorial art. This may strike many of my readers as a limited and even trivial inquiry, with little of the heroic or the romantic in it; but it was none the less carried to a very fine point by our clever young men. Nick suspected Nash of exaggerating his encouragement in order to play a malign trick on the political world, at whose expense it was his fancy to divert himself (without making that organization bankrupt assuredly), and reminded him that his present accusation of immorality was strangely inconsistent with the wanton hope expressed by him in Paris — the hope that the Liberal

candidate at Harsh would be returned. Nash replied, first, "Oh, I had n't been in this place then!" but he defended himself more effectually in saying that it was not of Nick's having got elected that he complained: it was of his visible hesitancy to throw up his seat. Nick requested that he would n't speak of this, and his gallantry failed to render him incapable of saying, "The fact is I have n't the nerve for it." They talked then for a while of what he could do, not of what he could n't; of the mysteries and miracles of reproduction and representation; of the strong, sane joys of the artistic life. Nick made afresh, with more fullness, his great confession, that his private ideal of happiness was the life of a great painter of portraits. He uttered his thought about this so copiously and lucidly that Nash's own abundance was stilled, and he listened almost as if he had been listening to something new, difficult as it was to suppose that there could be a point of view in relation to such a matter with which he was unacquainted.

"There it is," said Nick at last — "there 's the naked, preposterous truth: that if I were to do exactly as I liked I should spend my years copying the more or less vacuous countenances of my fellow-mortals. I should find peace and pleasure and wisdom and worth, I should find fascination and a measure of success in it — out of the din and the dust and the scramble, the world of party labels, party cries, party bargains and

party treacheries — of humbuggery, hypocrisy and cant. The cleanness and quietness of it, the independent effort to do something, to leave something which shall give joy to man long after the howling has died away to the last ghost of an echo — such a vision solicits me at certain hours with an almost irresistible force."

As he dropped these remarks Nick lolled on a big divan, with one of his long legs folded up; and his visitor stopped in front of him, after moving about the room vaguely and softly, almost on tiptoe, not to interrupt him. "You speak with the eloquence that rises to a man's lips on a very particular occasion: when he has, practically, what ever his theory may be, renounced the right and dropped, hideously, into the wrong. Then his regret for the right, a certain exquisite appreciation of it, takes on an accent which I know well how to recognize."

Nick looked up at him a moment. "You 've hit it, if you mean by that that I have n't resigned my seat and that I don't intend to."

"I thought you took it only to give it up. Don't you remember our talk in Paris?"

"I like to be a part of the spectacle that amuses you, but I could scarcely have taken so much trouble as that for it."

"But is n't it an absurd comedy, the life you lead?"

"Comedy or tragedy — I don't know which; whatever it is, I appear to be capable of it to please two or three people."

"Then you *can* take trouble?" said Nash.

"Yes, for the woman I 'm to marry."

"Ah, you 're to marry?"

"That 's what has come on since we met in Paris, and it makes just the difference."

"Ah, my poor friend," smiled Gabriel, standing there, "no wonder you have an eloquence, an accent!"

"It 's a pity I have them in the wrong place. I 'm expected to have them in the House of Commons."

"You will when you make your farewell speech there — to announce that you chuck it up. And may I venture to ask who 's to be your wife?" Gabriel went on.

"Mrs. Dallow has kindly consented. I think you saw her in Paris."

"Ah, yes: you spoke of her to me, and I remember asking you if you were in love with her."

"I was n't then."

Nash hesitated a moment. "And are you now?"

"Oh, dear, yes," said Nick.

"That would be better, if it was n't worse."

"Nothing could be better; it 's the best thing that can happen to me."

"Well," said Nash, "you must let me very respectfully approach her. You must let me bring her round."

"Bring her round?"

"Talk her over."

"Over to what?" Nick repeated his companion's words, a little as if it were to gain time, remembering the effect Gabriel Nash had produced upon Julia — an effect which scantily ministered to the idea of another meeting. Julia had had no occasion to allude again to Nick's imperturbable friend; he had passed out of her life at once and forever; but there flickered up a vivid recollection of the contempt he had led her to express, together with a sense of how odd she would think it that her intended should have thrown over two pleasant visits to cultivate such company.

"Over to a proper pride in what you may do — what you may do above all if she will help you."

"I scarcely see how she can help me," said Nick, with an air of thinking.

"She's extremely handsome, as I remember her: you could do great things with her."

"Ah, there's the rub," Nick went on. "I wanted her to sit for me, this week, but she would n't."

"Elle a bien tort. You should do some fine strong type. Is Mrs. Dallow in London?" Nash inquired.

"For what do you take her? She's paying visits."

"Then I have a model for you."

"Then you have — ?" Nick stared. "What has that to do with Mrs. Dallow's being away?"

"Does n't it give you more time?"

"Oh, the time flies!" sighed Nick, in a manner that caused his companion to break into a laugh —a laugh in which, for a moment, he himself joined, blushing a little.

"Does she like you to paint?" Nash continued, with one of his candid intonations.

"So she says."

"Well, do something fine to show her."

"I 'd rather show it to you," Nick confessed.

"My dear fellow, I see it from here, if you do your duty. Do you remember the Tragic Muse?" Nash pursued, explicatively.

"The Tragic Muse?"

"That girl in Paris, whom we heard at the old actress's, and whom we afterwards met at the charming entertainment given by your cousin (is n't he?) the secretary of embassy."

"Oh, Peter's girl: of course I remember her."

"Don't call her Peter's; call her rather mine," Nash said, with good-humored dissuasiveness. "I invented her, I introduced her, I revealed her."

"I thought, on the contrary, you ridiculed and repudiated her."

"As an individual, surely not; I seem to myself to have been all the while rendering her services. I said I disliked tea-party ranters, and so I do; but if my estimate of her powers was below the mark she has more than punished me."

"What has she done?" asked Nick.

"She has become interesting, as I suppose you know."

"How should I know?"

"You must see her, you must paint her," said Nash. "She tells me that something was said about it that day at Madame Carré's."

"Oh, I remember — said by Peter."

"Then it will please Mr. Sherringham — you 'll be glad to do that. I suppose you know all he has done for Miriam?"

"Not a bit. I know nothing about Peter's affairs, unless it be, in general, that he goes in for mountebanks and mimes and that it occurs to me I have heard one of my sisters mention — the rumor had come to her — that he has been backing Miss Rooth."

"Miss Rooth delights to talk of his kindness; she is charming when she speaks of it. It's to his good offices that she owes her appearance here."

"Here? Is she in London?" Nick inquired.

"D'où tombez-vous? I thought you people read the papers."

"What should I read, when I sit (sometimes!) through the stuff they put into them?"

"Of course I see that — that your engagement at your own theatre keeps you from going to the others. Learn then," said Gabriel Nash, "that you have a great competitor, and that you are distinctly not, much as you may suppose it, *the* rising comedian. The Tragic Muse is the great

modern personage. Have n't you heard people speak of her, have n't you been taken to see her ? "

" I dare say I 've heard of her ; but with a good many other things on my mind I had forgotten it."

" Certainly I can imagine what has been on your mind. She remembers you, at any rate ; she repays neglect with sympathy. She wants to come and see you."

" To see me ? "

" To be seen by you — it comes to the same thing. She 's worth seeing : you must let me bring her ; you 'll find her very suggestive. That idea that you should paint her — she appears to consider it a sort of bargain."

" A bargain ? What will she give me ? " Nick asked.

" A splendid model. She *is* splendid."

" Oh, then bring her," said Nick.

XXV.

NASH brought her, the great modern personage, as he had described her, the very next day, and it took Nick Dormer but a short time to appreciate his declaration that Miriam Rooth was splendid. She had made an impression upon him ten months before, but it had haunted him only for a day, immediately overlaid with other images. Yet after Nash had spoken of her a few moments he evoked her again; some of her attitudes, some of her tones, began to hover before him. He was pleased in advance with the idea of painting her. When she stood there in fact, however, it seemed to him that he had remembered her wrong: the brilliant young lady who instantly filled his studio with a presence that it had never known was exempt from the curious clumsiness which had interfused his former admiration of her with a certain pity. Miriam Rooth was light and bright and straight to-day — straight without being stiff and bright without being garish. To Nick's perhaps inadequately sophisticated mind the model, the actress, were figures with a vulgar setting; but it would have been impossible to show that taint less than his present extremely natural yet extremely distin-

guished visitor. She was more natural even than Gabriel Nash ("nature" was still Nick's formula for his old friend), and beside her he appeared almost commonplace.

Nash recognized her superiority with a frankness that was honorable to both of them, testifying in this manner to his sense that they were all three serious beings, worthy to deal with realities. She attracted crowds to her theatre, but to his appreciation of such a fact as that, important doubtless in its way, there were limits which he had already expressed. What he now felt bound in all integrity to express was his perception that she had, in general and quite apart from the question of the box-office, a remarkable, a very remarkable, artistic nature. He confessed that she had surprised him there; knowing of her in other days mainly that she was hungry to adopt an overrated profession, he had not imputed to her the normal measure of intelligence. Now he saw — he had had some talks with her — that she *was* intelligent; so much so that he was sorry for the embarrassment it would be to her. Nick could imagine the discomfort of having that sort of commodity to dispose of in such conditions. "She 's a distinguished woman — really a distinguished woman," Nash explained, kindly and lucidly, almost paternally; "and the head you can see for yourself."

Miriam, smiling, as she sat on an old Venetian chair, held aloft, with the noblest effect, that por-

tion of her person to which this patronage was extended, and remarked to Nick that, strange as it might appear, she had got quite to like poor Mr. Nash; she could make him go about with her; it was a relief to her mother.

"When I take him she has perfect peace," the girl said; "then she can stay at home and see the interviewers. She delights in that and I hate it, so our friend here is a great comfort. Of course a *femme de théâtre* is supposed to be able to go out alone, but there 's a kind of appearance, an added *chic*, in having some one. People think he 's my companion; I 'm sure they fancy I pay him. I would pay him rather than give him up, for it does n't matter that he 's not a lady. He *is* one in tact and sympathy, as you see. And base as he thinks the sort of thing I do, he can't keep away from the theatre. When you 're celebrated, people will look at you who, before, could never find out for themselves why they should."

"When you 're celebrated you become handsomer; at least that 's what has happened to you, though you were pretty, too, of old," Gabriel argued. "I go to the theatre to look at your head; it gives me the greatest pleasure. I take up anything of that sort as soon as I find it; one never knows how long it may last."

"Are you speaking of my appearance?" Miriam asked.

"Dear no, of my own pleasure, the first freshness," Nash went on. "Dormer, at least, let me

tell you in justice to him, has n't waited till you were celebrated to want to see you again (he stands there open-eyed); for the simple reason that he had n't the least idea of your renown. I had to announce it to him."

"Have n't you seen me act?" Miriam asked, without reproach, of her host.

"I 'll go to-night," said Nick.

"You have your Parliament, have n't you? What do they call it — the demands of public life?" Miriam continued: to which Gabriel Nash rejoined that he had the demands of private as well, inasmuch as he was in love — he was on the point of being married. Miriam listened to this with participation; then she said: "Ah, then, do bring your — what do they call her in English? I 'm always afraid of saying something improper — your *future.* I 'll send you a box, under the circumstances; you 'll like that better." She added that if he were to paint her he would have to see her often on the stage, would n't he? to profit by the *optique de la scène* (what did they call *that* in English?), studying her and fixing his impression. Before he had time to respond to this proposition she asked him if it disgusted him to hear her speak like that, as if she were always posing and thinking about herself, living only to be looked at, thrusting forward her person. She often got sick of doing so, already; but *à la guerre comme à la guerre.*

"That 's the fine artistic nature, you see — a

sort of divine disgust breaking out in her," Nash expounded.

"If you want to paint me at all, of course. I'm struck with the way I'm taking that for granted," Miriam continued. "When Mr. Nash spoke of it to me I jumped at the idea. I remembered our meeting in Paris and the kind things you said to me. But no doubt one ought n't to jump at ideas when they represent serious sacrifices on the part of others."

"Does n't she speak well?" Nash exclaimed to Nick. "Oh, she 'll go far!"

"It 's a great privilege to me to paint you: what title in the world have I to pretend to such a model?" Nick replied to Miriam. "The sacrifice is yours — a sacrifice of time and good-nature and credulity. You come, in your beauty and your genius, to this shabby place where I 've nothing to show, not a guarantee to offer you; and I wonder what I 've done to deserve such a gift of the gods."

"Does n't *he* speak well?" Nash demanded, smiling, of Miriam.

She took no notice of him, but she repeated to Nick that she had n't forgotten his friendly attitude in Paris: and when he answered that he surely had done very little she broke out, first resting her eyes on him a moment with a deep, reasonable smile and then springing up quickly: "Ah, well, if I must justify myself, I liked you!"

"Fancy my appearing to challenge you!"

laughed Nick. "To see you again is to want tremendously to try something; but you must have an infinite patience, because I'm an awful duffer."

Miriam looked round the walls. "I see what you have done — *bien des choses.*"

"She understands — she understands," Gabriel dropped. And he added to Miriam: "Imagine, when he might do something, his choosing a life of shams! At bottom he's like you — a wonderful artistic nature."

"I'll have patience," said the girl, smiling at Nick.

"Then, my children, I leave you — the peace of the Lord be with you." With these words Nash took his departure.

The others chose a position for Miriam's sitting, after she had placed herself in many different attitudes and different lights; but an hour had elapsed before Nick got to work — began, on a large canvas, to "knock her in," as he called it. He was hindered a little even by a certain nervousness, the emotion of finding himself, out of a clear sky, confronted with such a sitter and launched in such a task. The situation was incongruous, just after he had formally renounced all manner of "art" — the renunciation taking effect not a bit the less from the whim that he had consciously treated himself to *as* a whim (the last he should ever indulge), the freak of relapsing for a fortnight into a fingering of old

sketches, for the purpose, as he might have said, of burning them up, of clearing out his studio and terminating his lease. There were both embarrassment and inspiration in the strange chance of snatching back, for an hour, a relinquished joy: the jump with which he found he could still rise to such an occasion took away his breath a little, at the same time that the idea — the idea of what one might make of such material — touched him with an irresistible wand. On the spot, to his inner vision, Miriam became a magnificent result, drawing a hundred formative instincts out of their troubled sleep, defying him where he privately felt strongest and imposing herself triumphantly in her own strength. He had the good fortune to see her, as a subject, without striking matches, in a vivid light, and his quick attempt was as exciting as a sudden gallop — it was almost the sense of riding a runaway horse.

She was, in her way, so fine that he could only think how to "do" her: that hard calculation soon flattened out the consciousness, lively in him at first, that she was a beautiful woman who had sought him out in his retirement. At the end of their first sitting her having sought him out appeared the most natural thing in the world: he had a perfect right to entertain her there — explanations and complications were engulfed in the productive mood. The business of "knocking her in" held up a lamp to her beauty,

showed him how much there was of it and that she was infinitely interesting. He did n't want to fall in love with her (that would be a sell! as he said to himself), and she promptly became much too interesting for that. Nick might have reflected, for simplification's sake, as his cousin Peter had done, but with more validity, that he was engaged with Miss Rooth in an undertaking that did n't in the least refer to themselves, that they were working together seriously and that work was a suspension of sensibility. But after her first sitting (she came, poor girl, but twice), the need of such exorcisms passed from his spirit: he had so thoroughly, practically taken her up. As to whether Miriam had the same bright, still sense of coöperation to a definite end, the sense of the distinctively technical nature of the answer to every question to which the occasion might give birth, that mystery would be cleared up only if it were open to us to regard this young lady through some other medium than the mind of her friends. We have chosen, as it happens, for some of the advantages it carries with it, the indirect vision ; and it fails as yet to tell us (what Nick of course wondered about before he ceased to care, as indeed he intimated to his visitor) why a young person crowned with success should have taken it into her head that there was something for her in so blighted a spot. She should have gone to one of the regular people, the great people : they would have welcomed her with open

arms. When Nick asked her if some of the R. A.'s had n't expressed a desire to have a crack at her, she said: "Oh, dear, no, only the tiresome photographers; and fancy *them*, in the future. If mamma could only do *that* for me!" And she added, with the charming fellowship for which she was conspicuous on this occasion: "You know I don't think any one yet has been quite so much struck with me as you."

"Not even Peter Sherringham?" asked Nick, laughing and stepping back to judge of the effect of a line.

"Oh, Mr. Sherringham's different. You 're an artist."

"For Heaven's sake, don't say that!" cried Nick. "And as regards your art, I thought Peter knew more than any one."

"Ah, you 're severe," said Miriam.

"Severe?"

"Because that 's what he thinks. But he does know a lot — he has been a providence to me."

"And why has n't he come here to see you act?"

Miriam hesitated a moment. "How do you know he has n't come?"

"Because I take for granted he would have called on me if he had."

"Does he like you very much?" asked Miriam.

"I don't know. I like him."

"He 's a gentleman — *pour cela*," said Miriam.

"Oh, yes, for that!" Nick went on absently, sketching hard.

"But he's afraid of me — afraid to see me."

"Does n't he think you're good enough?"

"On the contrary — he believes I shall carry him away and he's in a terror of my doing it."

"He ought to like that," said Nick.

"That's what I mean when I say he's not an artist. However, he declares he does like it, only it appears it is not the right thing for him. Oh, the right thing — he's bent upon getting that. But it's not for me to blame him, for I am too. He's coming, some night, however: he shall have a dose!"

"Poor Peter!" Nick exclaimed, with a compassion none the less real because it was mirthful: the girl's tone was so expressive of good-humored, unscrupulous power.

"He's such a curious mixture," Miriam went on; "sometimes I lose patience with him. It is n't exactly trying to serve both God and Mammon, but it's muddling up the stage and the world. The world be hanged; the stage, or anything of that sort (I mean one's faith), comes first."

"Brava, brava! you do me good," Nick murmured, still hilarious and at his work. "But it's very kind of you, when I was in this absurd state of ignorance, to attribute to me the honor of having been more struck with you than any one else," he continued, after a moment.

"Yes, I confess I don't quite see — when the shops were full of my photographs."

"Oh, I'm so poor — I don't go into shops," returned Nick.

"Are you very poor?"

"I live on alms."

"And don't they pay you — the government, the ministry?"

"Dear young lady, for what? — for shutting myself up with beautiful women?"

"Ah, you have others, then?" asked Miriam.

"They are not so kind as you, I confess."

"I'll buy it from you — what you're doing: I'll pay you well, when it's done," said the girl. "I've got money now; I make it, you know — a good lot of it. It's too delightful, after scraping and starving. Try it and you'll see. Give up the base, bad world."

"But isn't it supposed to be the base, bad world that pays?"

"Precisely; make it pay, without mercy — squeeze it dry. That's what it's meant for — to pay for art. Ah, if it was n't for that! I'll bring you a quantity of photographs, to-morrow — you must let me come back to-morrow: it's so amusing to have them, by the hundred, all for nothing, to give away. That's what takes mamma most: she can't get over it. That's luxury and glory; even at Castle Nugent they did n't do that. People used to sketch me, but not so much as mamma *veut bien le dire;* and in all my life I never had but one poor little *carte-de-visite,* when I was sixteen, in a plaid frock, with the banks of a river, at three francs the dozen."

XXVI.

It was success, Nick felt, that had made Miriam finer — the full possession of her talent and the sense of the recognition of it. There was an intimation in her presence (if he had given his mind to it) that for him too the same cause would produce the same effect — that is, would show him that there is nothing like being launched in the practice of an art to learn what it may do for one. Nick felt clumsy beside a person who manifestly, now, had such an extraordinary familiarity with the point of view. He remembered, too, the clumsiness that had been in his visitor — something clumsy and shabby, of quite another quality from her actual smartness, as London people would call it, her well-appointedness and her evident command of more than one manner. Handsome as she had been the year before, she had suggested provincial lodgings, bread and butter, heavy tragedy and tears; and if then she was an ill-dressed girl with thick hair, who wanted to be an actress, she was already, in a few weeks, an actress who could act even at not acting. She showed what a light hand she could have, forbore to startle and looked as well, for unprofessional life, as Julia: which was only the perfection of her professional character.

This function came out much in her talk, for there were many little bursts of confidence as well as many familiar pauses as she sat there; and she was ready to tell Nick the whole history of her *début* — the chance that had suddenly turned up and that she had caught, with a jump, as it passed. He missed some of the details, in his attention to his own task, and some of them he failed to understand, attached as they were to the name of Mr. Basil Dashwood, which he heard for the first time. It was through Mr. Dashwood's extraordinary exertions that a hearing — a morning performance at a London theatre — had been obtained for her. That had been the great step, for it had led to the putting on at night of the play, at the same theatre, in place of a wretched thing they were trying (it was no use) to keep on its feet, and to her engagement for the principal part. She had made a hit in it (she could n't pretend not to know that); but she was already tired of it, there were so many other things she wanted to do; and when she thought it would probably run a month or two more she was in the humor to curse the odious conditions of artistic production in such an age. The play was a simplified version of a new French piece, a thing that had taken in Paris, at a third-rate theatre, and had now, in London, proved itself good enough for houses mainly made up of ten-shilling stalls. It was Dashwood who had said it would go, if they could get the rights and a

fellow to make some changes: he had discovered it at a nasty little theatre she had never been to, over the Seine. They had got the rights, and the fellow who had made the changes was practically Dashwood himself; there was another man, in London, Mr. Gushmore — Miriam didn't know whether Nick would ever have heard of him (Nick hadn't) who had done some of it. It had been awfully chopped down, to a mere bone, with the meat all gone; but that was what people in London seemed to like. They were very innocent, like little dogs amusing themselves with a bone. At any rate, she had made something, she had made a figure, of the woman (a dreadful idiot, really, especially in what Dashwood had muddled her into); and Miriam added, in the complacency of her young expansion: "Oh, give me fifty words, any time, and the ghost of a situation, and I'll set you up a figure. Besides, I mustn't abuse poor Yolande — she has saved us," she said.

"Yolande?"

"Our ridiculous play. That's the name of the impossible woman. She has put bread into our mouths and she's a loaf on the shelf for the future. The rights are mine."

"You're lucky to have them," said Nick a little vaguely, troubled about his sitter's nose, which was, somehow, Jewish without the convex arch.

"Indeed I am. He gave them to me. Wasn't it charming?"

"He gave them — Mr. Dashwood?"

"Dear me, no; where should poor Dashwood have got them? He has n't a penny in the world. Besides, if he had got them he would have kept them. I mean your blessed cousin."

"I see — they 're a present from Peter."

"Like many other things. Is n't he a dear? If it had n't been for him the shelf would have remained bare. He bought the play for this country and America for four hundred pounds, and on the chance: fancy! There was no rush for it, and how could he tell? And then he gracefully handed it to me. So I have my little capital. Is n't he a duck? You have nice cousins."

Nick assented to the proposition, only putting in an amendment to the effect that surely Peter had nice cousins also, and making, as he went on with his work, a tacit preoccupied reflection or two; such as that it must be pleasant to render little services like that to youth, beauty and genius (he rather wondered how Peter could afford them), and that, "duck" as he was, Miss Rooth's benefactor was rather taken for granted. *Sic vos non vobis* faintly murmured itself in Nick's brain. This community of interests, or at least of relations, quickened the flight of time, so that he was still fresh when the sitting came to an end. It was settled that Miriam should come back on the morrow, to enable her portrayer to make the most of the few days of the parliamentary recess; and just before she left him she asked —

"Then you *will* come to-night?"

"Without fail. I hate to lose an hour of you."

"Then I 'll place you. It will be my affair."

"You 're very kind," he responded. "Is n't it a simple matter for me to take a stall? This week, I suppose, they 're to be had."

"I 'll send you a box," said Miriam. "You shall do it well. There are plenty now."

"Why should I be lost, all alone, in the grandeur of a box?"

"Can't you bring your friend?"

"My friend?"

"The lady you are engaged to."

"Unfortunately she is out of town."

Miriam looked at him with a grand profundity. "Does she leave you alone like that?"

"She thought I should like it — I should be more free to paint. You see I am."

"Yes, perhaps it 's good for *me*. Have you got her portrait?" Miriam asked.

"She does n't like me to paint her."

"Really? Perhaps, then, she won't like you to paint me."

"That 's why I want to be quick," laughed Nick.

"Before she knows it?"

"She 'll know it to-morrow. I shall write to her."

Miriam gave him another of her special looks; then she said, "I see you 're afraid of her." And she added, "Mention my name; they 'll give you the box at the theatre."

Whether or no Nick were afraid of Mrs. Dallow, he still protested against receiving this bounty from the hands of Miss Rooth — repeated that he would rather take a stall, according to his wont, and pay for it. This led her to declare with a sudden flicker of passion that if he did n't do as she wished she would never sit to him again.

"Ah, then you have me," returned Nick. "Only I *don't* see why you should give me so many things."

"What in the world have I given you?"

"Why, an idea." And Nick looked at his picture a little ruefully. "I don't mean to say I have n't let it fall and smashed it."

"Ah, an idea — that *is* a great thing for people in our line. But you 'll see me much better from the box, and I 'll send you Gabriel Nash," Miriam added, getting into the hansom which her host's servant had fetched for her. As Nick turned back into his studio after watching her drive away, he laughed at the conception that they were in the same "line."

Nick shared his box at the theatre with Gabriel Nash, who talked during the *entr'actes*, not in the least about the performance or the performer, but about the possible greatness of the art of the portraitist — its reach, its range, its fascination, the magnificent examples it had left us in the past: windows open into history, into psychology, things that were among the most

precious possessions of the human race. He insisted, above all, on the interest, the richness arising from this great peculiarity of it; that, unlike most other forms, it was a revelation of two realities, the man whom it was the artist's conscious effort to reveal and the man (the interpreter) expressed in the very quality and temper of that effort. It offered a double vision, the strongest dose of life that art could give, the strongest dose of art that life could give. Nick Dormer had already become aware that he had two states of mind in listening to Gabriel Nash: one of them in which he laughed, doubted, sometimes even reprobated, and at any rate failed to follow or to accept; the other in which this contemplative genius seemed to take the words out of his mouth, to utter for him, better and more completely, the very things he was on the point of saying. Nash's saying them, at such moments, appeared to make them true, to set them up in the world, and to-night he said a good many, especially as to the happiness of cultivating one's own garden; growing there, in stillness and freedom, certain strong, pure flowers that would bloom forever, long after the rank weeds of the hour were withered and blown away.

It was to keep Miriam Rooth in his eye, for his object, that Nick had come to the play; and she dwelt there all the evening, being constantly on the stage. He was so occupied in watching her face (for he now saw pretty clearly what he

should attempt to make of it) that he was conscious only in a secondary degree of the story she illustrated, and in regard to her acting, in particular, had mainly a surprised sense that she was extraordinarily quiet. He remembered her loudness, her violence in Paris, at Peter Sherringham's, her wild wails, the first time, at Madame Carré's; compared with which her present manner was eminently temperate and modern. Nick Dormer was not critical at the theatre; he believed what he saw and had a pleasant sense of the inevitable; therefore he would not have guessed what Gabriel Nash had to tell him — that for Miriam, with her tragic cast and her peculiar attributes, her present performance, full of actuality, of light, fine indications and, in parts, of pointed touches of comedy, was a rare *tour de force*. It went on altogether in a register that he had not supposed her to possess; in which, as he said, she did n't touch her capital, doing it wholly with her little savings. It gave him the idea that she was capable of almost anything.

In one of the intervals they went round to see her; but for Nick this purpose was partly defeated by the wonderful amiability with which he was challenged by Mrs. Rooth, whom they found sitting with her daughter and who attacked him with a hundred questions about his dear mother and his charming sisters. She maintained that that day in Paris they had shown her a kindness she should never forget. She abounded also in

gracious expressions in regard to the portrait he had so cleverly begun, declaring that she was so eager to see it, however little he might as yet have accomplished, that she should do herself the honor to wait upon him in the morning, when Miriam came to sit.

"I 'm acting for *you* to-night," the girl said to Nick, before he returned to his place.

"No, that 's exactly what you are not doing," Nash interposed, with one of his intellectual superiorities. "You have stopped acting, you have reduced it to the least that will do, you simply *are* — you are just the visible image, the picture on the wall. It keeps you wonderfully in focus. I have never seen you so beautiful."

Miriam stared at this; then it could be seen that she colored. "What a luxury in life to have everything explained! He 's the great explainer," she said, turning to Nick.

He shook hands with her for good-night. "Well, then, we must give him lots to do."

She came to his studio in the morning, but unaccompanied by her mother; in allusion to whom she simply said, "Mamma wished to come, but I would n't let her." They proceeded promptly to business. The girl divested herself of her hat and coat, taking the position already established for her. After they had worked for more than an hour with much less talk than the day before, Nick being extremely absorbed and Miriam wearing, in silence, the kindest, most religious air of

consideration for the sharp tension she imposed upon him — at the end of this period of patience, pervaded by a holy calm, our young lady suddenly got up and exclaimed, "I say, I *must* see it!" with which, quickly, she stepped down from her place and came round to the canvas. She had, at Nick's request, not looked at his work the day before. He fell back, glad to rest, and put down his palette and brushes.

"Ah, bien, c'est tapé!" Miriam cried, as she stood before the easel. Nick was pleased with her ejaculation, he was even pleased with what he had done; he had had a long, happy spurt and felt excited and sanctioned. Miriam, retreating also a little, sank into a high-backed, old-fashioned chair that stood two or three yards from the picture and reclined in it, with her head on one side, looking at the rough resemblance. She made a remark or two about it, to which Nick replied, standing behind her and after a moment leaning on the top of the chair. He was away from his work, and his eyes searched it with a kind of fondness of hope. They rose, however, as he presently became conscious that the door of the large room opposite to him had opened without making a sound and that some one stood upon the threshold. The person on the threshold was Julia Dallow.

As soon as he perceived her Nick wished he had posted a letter to her the night before. He had written only that morning. Nevertheless

there was genuine joy in the words with which he bounded toward her — "Ah, my dear Julia, what a jolly surprise!" — for her unannounced descent spoke to him above all of an irresistible desire to see him again sooner than they had arranged. She had taken a step forward, but she had done no more, stopping short at the sight of the strange woman, so divested of visiting-gear that she looked half undressed, who lounged familiarly in the middle of the room and over whom Nick had been still more familiarly hanging. Julia's eyes rested on this embodied unexpectedness, and as they did so she grew pale — so pale that Nick, observing it, instinctively looked back to see what Miriam had done to produce such an effect. She had done nothing at all, which was precisely what was embarrassing; only staring at the intruder, motionless and superb. She seemed, somehow, in indolent possession of the place, and even in that instant Nick noted how handsome she looked; so that he exclaimed somewhere, inaudibly, in a region beneath his other emotions, "How I should like to paint her *that* way!" Mrs. Dallow transferred her eyes for a single moment to Nick's; then they turned away — away from Miriam, ranging over the room.

"I've got a sitter, but you must n't mind that; we 're taking a rest. I 'm delighted to see you," said Nick. He closed the door of the studio behind her; his servant was still at the outer

door, which was open and through which he saw Julia's carriage drawn up. This made her advance a little further, but still she said nothing; she dropped no answer even when Nick went on, with a sense of awkwardness: "When did you come back? I hope nothing has gone wrong. You come at a very interesting moment," he continued, thinking, as soon as he had spoken, that they were such words as might have made her laugh. She was far from laughing: she only managed to look neither at him nor at Miriam and to say, after a little, when he had repeated his question about her return:

"I came back this morning — I came straight here."

"And nothing 's wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no — everything 's all right," she replied very quickly and without expression. She vouchsafed no explanation of her premature return and took no notice of the seat Nick offered her; neither did she appear to hear him when he begged her not to look yet at the work on the easel — it was in such a dreadful state. He was conscious, as he phrased it, that this request gave to Miriam's position, directly in front of his canvas, an air of privilege which her neglect to recognize in any way Mrs. Dallow's entrance or her importance did nothing to correct. But that mattered less if the appeal failed to reach Julia's intelligence, as he judged, seeing presently how deeply she was agitated. Nothing mattered, in

face of the sense of danger which took possession of him after she had been in the room a few moments. He wanted to say, "What's the difficulty? Has anything happened?" but he felt that she would not like him to utter words so intimate in presence of the person she had been rudely startled to find between them. He pronounced Miriam's name to Mrs. Dallow and Mrs. Dallow's to Miriam, but Julia's recognition of the ceremony was so slight as to be scarcely perceptible. Miriam had the air of waiting for something more before she herself made a sign; and as nothing more came she continued to be silent and not to budge. Nick added a remark to the effect that Mrs. Dallow would remember to have had the pleasure of meeting Miss Rooth the year before — in Paris, that day, at her brother Peter's; to which Mrs. Dallow rejoined, "Ah, yes," without any qualification, while she looked down at some rather rusty studies, on panels, which were ranged along the floor, resting against the base of the wall. Her agitation was evidently a pain to herself; she had had a shock of extreme violence, and Nick saw that as Miriam showed no symptom of offering to give up her sitting her stay would be of the briefest. He wished Miriam would do something — say she would go, get up, move about; as it was she had the appearance of watching, from her point of vantage, Mrs. Dallow's discomfiture. He made a series of inquiries about Julia's doings in the

country, to two or three of which she gave answers monosyllabic and scarcely comprehensible, while she turned her eyes round and round the room as if she were looking for something she could n't find — for an escape, for something that was not Miriam. At last she said — it was at the end of a very few minutes :

"I did n't come to stay — when you 're so busy. I only looked in to see if you were here. Good-by."

"It 's charming of you to have come. I 'm so glad you 've seen for yourself how well I 'm occupied," Nick replied, not unaware that he was very red. This made Mrs. Dallow look at him, while Miriam considered them both. Julia's eyes had something in them that he had never seen before — a flash of fright by which he was himself frightened. "Of course I 'll see you later," he added, laughing awkwardly, while she reached the door, which she opened herself and got out, without a good-day to Miriam. "I wrote to you this morning — you 've missed my letter," he repeated behind her, having already given her this information. The door of the studio was very near that of the house, but before Mrs. Dallow had reached the street the visitors' bell was set ringing. The passage was narrow and she kept in advance of Nick, anticipating his motion to open the street-door. The bell was tinkling still when, by the action of her own hand, a gentleman on the step stood revealed.

"Ah, my dear, don't go!" Nick heard pronounced in quick, soft dissuasion and in the now familiar accents of Gabriel Nash. The rectification followed more quickly still, if that were a rectification which scarcely improved the matter: "I beg a thousand pardons. I thought you were Miriam."

Gabriel gave way, and Mrs. Dallow dashed out of the house. Her carriage, a victoria with a pair of horses who had got hot, had taken a turn up the street, but the coachman had already perceived his mistress and was rapidly coming back. He drew near; not so fast, however, but that Gabriel Nash had time to accompany Mrs. Dallow to the edge of the pavement with an apology for the freedom into which he had blundered. Nick was at her other hand, waiting to put her into her carriage and freshly disconcerted by the encounter with Nash, who somehow, as he stood making Julia an explanation that she did n't listen to, looked less eminent than usual, though not more conscious of difficulties. Nick colored deeper and watched the footman spring down as the victoria drove up; he heard Nash say something about the honor of having met Mrs. Dallow in Paris. Nick wanted him to go into the house; he damned inwardly his want of delicacy. He desired a word with Julia alone — as much alone as the two inconvenient servants would allow. But Nash was not too much discouraged to say: "You came for a glimpse of the great

model? *Does n't* she sit? That 's what I wanted too, this morning — just a look, for a blessing on the day. Ah, but *you*, madam — "

Julia had sprung into the carriage while he was still speaking and had flashed out to the coachman a "Home!" which of itself set the vehicle in motion. The carriage went a few yards, but while Gabriel, with a magnificent bow, turned away, Nick Dormer, with his hand on the edge of the hood, moved with it.

"You don't like it, but I 'll explain," he said, laughing and in a low tone.

"Explain what?" Mrs. Dallow asked, still very pale and grave, but showing nothing in her voice. She was thinking of the servants. She could think of them even then.

"Oh, it 's all right. I 'll come in at five," Nick returned, gallantly jocular, while the carriage rolled away.

Gabriel had gone into the studio and Nick found him standing in admiration before Miriam, who had resumed the position in which she was sitting.

"Lord, she 's good to-day! Is n't she good to-day?" Nash broke out, seizing Nick by the arm to give him a certain view. Miriam looked indeed still handsomer than before, and she had taken up her attitude again with a splendid sphinx-like air of being capable of keeping it forever. Nick said nothing, but he went back to work with a tingle of confusion, which proved,

in fact, when he resumed his palette, to be a sharp and, after a moment, a delightful stimulus. Miriam spoke never a word, but she was doubly grand, and for more than an hour, till Nick, exhausted, declared he must stop, the industrious silence was broken only by the desultory discourse of Gabriel Nash.

XXVII.

NICK DORMER went to Great Stanhope Street at five o'clock and learned, rather to his surprise, that Mrs. Dallow was not at home — to his surprise because he had told her he would come at that hour, and he attributed to her, with a certain simplicity, an eager state of mind in regard to his explanation. Apparently she was not eager; the eagerness was his own — he was eager to explain. He recognized, not without a certain consciousness of magnanimity in doing so, that there had been some reason for her quick withdrawal from his studio, or at any rate for her extreme discomposure there. He had, a few days before, put in a plea for a snatch of worship in that sanctuary, and she had accepted and approved it; but the worship, when the curtain happened to blow back, proved to be that of a magnificent young woman, an actress with disordered hair, who wore in a singular degree the aspect of a person arrived to spend the day. The explanation was easy: it resided in the circumstance that when one was painting, even very badly and only for a moment, one had to have models. Nick was impatient to give it, with frank, affectionate lips and a full, jocose admis-

sion that it was natural Julia should have been startled; and he was the more impatient that, though he would not in the least have expected her to like finding a strange woman domesticated, for the hour, under his roof, she had disliked it even more than would have seemed probable. That was because, not having heard from him about the matter, the impression was, for the moment, irresistible with her that a trick had been played her. But three minutes with him alone would make the difference.

They would indeed have a considerable difference to make, Nick reflected, as minutes much more numerous elapsed without bringing Mrs. Dallow home. For he had said to the butler that he would come in and wait (though it was odd she should not have left a message for him); she would doubtless return from one moment to the other. Nick had of course full license to wait, anywhere he preferred; and he was ushered into Julia's particular sitting-room and supplied with tea and the evening papers. After a quarter of an hour, however, he gave little attention to these beguilements, owing to the increase of his idea that it was odd that when she definitely knew he was coming she should not have taken more pains to be at home. He walked up and down and looked out of the window, took up her books and dropped them again, and then, as half an hour had elapsed, began to feel rather angry. What could she be about when, at a moment when Lon-

don was utterly empty, she could not be paying visits? A footman came in to attend to the fire; whereupon Nick questioned him as to the manner in which Mrs. Dallow was probably engaged. The man revealed the fact that his mistress had gone out only a quarter of an hour before Nick arrived, and, as if he appreciated the opportunity for a little decorous conversation, gave him still more information than he asked for. From this it appeared that, as Nick knew, or could surmise, she had the evening before, from the country, telegraphed for the victoria to meet her in the morning at Paddington and had gone straight from the station to the studio, while her maid, with her luggage, proceeded in a cab to Great Stanhope Street. On leaving the studio, however, she had not come directly home; she had chosen this unusual season for an hour's drive in the Park. She had finally reëntered her house, but had remained up-stairs all day, seeing no one and not coming down to luncheon. At four o'clock she had ordered the brougham for four forty-five, and had got into it punctually, saying "To the Park!" as she did so.

Nick, after the footman had left him, felt himself much mystified by Julia's sudden passion for the banks of the Serpentine, forsaken and foggy now, inasmuch as the afternoon had come on gray and the light was waning. She usually hated the Park and she hated a closed carriage. He had a discomfortable vision of her, shrunken

into a corner of her brougham and veiled as if she had been crying, revolving round the solitude of the Drive. She had of course been deeply disconcerted, and she was nervous and upset: the motion of the carriage soothed her and made her fidget less. Nick remembered that in the morning, at his door, she had appeared to be going home; so she had turned into the Park on second thoughts, as she passed. He lingered another half hour, walked up and down the room many times and thought of many things. Had she misunderstood him when he said he would come at five? Could n't she be sure, even if she had, that he would come early rather than late, and might she not have left a message for him, on the chance? Going out, that way, a few minutes before he was to come had even a little the air of a thing done on purpose to offend him; as if she had been so displeased that she had taken the nearest occasion of giving him a sign that she meant to break. But were these the things that Julia did and was that the way she did them — his fine, proud, delicate, generous Julia?

When six o'clock came poor Nick felt distinctly resentful; but he stayed ten minutes longer, on the possibility that Mrs. Dallow would, in the morning, have understood him to mention that hour. The April dusk began to gather and the unsociability of her behavior, especially if she were still rumbling about the Park, became absurd. Anecdotes came back to Nick, vaguely

remembered, heard he could n't have said when or where, of poor artists for whom life had been rendered difficult by wives who would n't allow them the use of the living female model and who made scenes if, on the staircase, they encountered such sources of inspiration. These ladies struck him as vulgar and odious persons, with whom it seemed grotesque that Julia should have anything in common. Of course she was not his wife yet, and of course, if she were, he should have washed his hands of every form of activity requiring the services of the sitter; but even these qualifications left him with a capacity to shudder at the way Julia just escaped ranking herself with the Philistines.

At a quarter past six he rang a bell and told the servant who answered it that he was going and that Mrs. Dallow was to be informed as soon as she came in that he had expected to find her and had waited an hour and a quarter for her. But he had just reached the doorstep, on his departure, when her brougham, emerging from the evening mist, stopped in front of the house. Nick stood at the door, hanging back till she got out, allowing the servants to help her. She saw him — she was not veiled, like his mental image of her; but this did not prevent her from pausing to give an order to the coachman, a matter apparently requiring some discussion. When she came to the door Nick remarked to her that he had been waiting an eternity for her; to which

she replied that he must not make a grievance to her of that — she was too unwell to do justice to it. He immediately professed regret and sympathy, adding, however, that in that case she had much better not have gone out. She made no answer to this — there were three servants in the hall who looked as if they might understand at least what was *not* said to them; only when he followed her in she asked if his idea had been to stay longer.

"Certainly, if you 're not too ill to see me."

"Come in, then," Julia said, turning back after having gone to the foot of the stairs.

This struck him immediately as a further restriction of his visit: she would not readmit him to the drawing-room or to her boudoir; she would receive him in an impersonal apartment downstairs, in which she saw people on business. What did she want to do to him? He was prepared, by this time, for a scene of jealousy; for he was sure he had learned to read her character justly in feeling that if she had the appearance of a cold woman she had also on certain occasions a liability to extreme emotion. She was very still, but every now and then she would fire off a pistol. As soon as Nick had closed the door she said, without sitting down:

"I dare say you saw I did n't like that at all."

"My having a sitter, that way? I was very much annoyed at it myself," Nick answered.

"Why were *you* annoyed? She's very handsome," said Mrs. Dallow, perversely.

"I didn't know you looked at her!" Nick laughed.

Julia hesitated a moment. "Was I very rude?"

"Oh, it was all right; it was only awkward for me, because you didn't know," Nick replied.

"I did know; that's why I came."

"How do you mean? My letter couldn't have reached you."

"I don't know anything about your letter," said Mrs. Dallow, casting about her for a chair, and then seating herself on the edge of a sofa, with her eyes on the floor.

"She sat to me yesterday; she was there all the morning; but I didn't write to tell you. I went at her with great energy and, absurd as it may seem to you, found myself very tired afterwards. Besides, in the evening I went to see her act."

"Does she act?" asked Mrs. Dallow.

"She's an actress: it's her profession. Don't you remember her that day, at Peter's, in Paris? She's already a celebrity; she has great talent; she's engaged at a theatre here and is making a sensation. As I tell you, I saw her last night."

"You needn't tell me," Mrs. Dallow replied, looking up at him with a face of which the intense, the tragic sadness startled him.

He had been standing before her, but at this

he instantly sat down beside her, taking her passive hand. "I want to, please; otherwise it must seem so odd to you. I knew she was coming when I wrote to you the day before yesterday. But I did n't tell you then, because I did n't know how it would turn out and I did n't want to exult, in advance, over a poor little attempt that might come to nothing. Moreover, it was no use speaking of the matter at all unless I told you exactly how it came about," Nick went on, explaining kindly, copiously. "It was the result of a visit unexpectedly paid me by Gabriel Nash."

"That man — the man who spoke to me?" Julia asked, startled into a shuddering memory.

"He did what he thought would please you, but I dare say it did n't. You met him in Paris and did n't like him; so I thought it best to hold my tongue about him."

"Do *you* like him?"

"Very much."

"Great heaven!" Julia ejaculated, almost under her breath.

"The reason I was annoyed was because, somehow, when you came in, I suddenly had the air of having got out of those visits and shut myself up in town to do something that I had kept from you. And I have been very unhappy till I could explain."

"You don't explain — you can't explain," Mrs. Dallow declared, turning on her companion eyes which, in spite of her studied stillness, expressed

deep excitement. "I knew it — I knew everything; that 's why I came."

"It was a sort of second sight — what they call a brain-wave," Nick smiled.

"I felt uneasy, I felt a kind of call; it came suddenly, yesterday. It was irresistible; nothing could have kept me this morning."

"That 's very serious, but it 's still more delightful. You must n't go away again," said Nick. "We must stick together — forever and ever."

He put his arm round her, but she detached herself as soon as she felt its pressure. She rose quickly, moving away, while, mystified, he sat looking up at her as she had looked a few moments before at him.

"I 've thought it all over; I 've been thinking of it all day," she began. "That 's why I did n't come in."

"Don't think of it too much; it is n't worth it."

"You like it more than anything else. You do — you can't deny it," she went on.

"My dear child, what are you talking about?" Nick asked, gently.

"That 's what you like — doing what you were this morning; with women lolling, with their things off, to be painted, and people like that man."

Nick slowly got up, hesitating. "My dear Julia, apart from the surprise, this morning, do you object to the living model?"

"Not a bit, for you."

"What 's the inconvenience, then, since, in my studio, they are only for me?"

"You love it, you revel in it; that 's what you want, and that 's the only thing you want!" Julia broke out.

"To have models, lolling women, do you mean?"

"That 's what I felt, what I knew, what came over me and haunted me yesterday, so that I could n't throw it off. It seemed to me that if I could see it with my eyes and have the perfect proof I should feel better, I should be quiet. And now I *am* — after a struggle of some hours, I confess. I *have* seen; the whole thing 's clear and I 'm satisfied."

"I 'm not, and to me the whole thing is n't clear. What, exactly, are you talking about?" Nick demanded.

"About what you were doing this morning. That 's your innermost preference, that 's your secret passion."

"A little go at something serious? Yes, it was almost serious," said Nick. "But it was an accident, this morning and yesterday: I got on better than I intended."

"I 'm sure you have immense talent," Mrs. Dallow remarked, with a joylessness that was almost droll.

"No, no, I might have had. I 've plucked it up: it 's too late for it to flower. My dear Julia,

I'm perfectly incompetent and perfectly resigned."

"Yes, you looked so this morning, when you hung over her. Oh, she'll bring back your talent!"

"She's an obliging and even an intelligent creature, and I've no doubt she would if she could. But I've received from you all the help that any woman is destined to give me. No one can do for me again what you have done."

"I should n't try it again; I acted in ignorance. Oh, I've thought it all out!" Julia declared. Then, with a strange face of anguish resting on his, she said, "Before it's too late — before it's too late!"

"Too late for what?"

"For you to be free — for you to be free. And for me — for me to be free too. You hate everything I like!" she exclaimed, with a trembling voice. "Don't pretend, don't pretend!" she went on, as a sound of protest broke from him.

"I thought you wanted me to paint," protested Nick, flushed and staring.

"I do — I do. That's why you must be free, why we must part."

"Why we must part?"

"Oh, I've turned it over. I've faced the truth. It would n't do at all," said Mrs. Dallow.

"I like the way you talk of it, as if it were a trimming for your dress!" Nick rejoined, with

bitterness. "Won't it do for you to be loved and cherished as well as any woman in England?"

Mrs. Dallow turned away from him, closing her eyes as if not to see something that would be dangerous to her. "You must n't give anything up for me. I should feel it all the while, and I should hate it. I 'm not afraid of the truth, but you are."

"The truth, dear Julia? I only want to know it," said Nick. "It seems to me I 've got hold of it. When two persons are united by the tenderest affection and are sane and generous and just, no difficulties that occur in the union their life makes for them are insurmountable, no problems are insoluble."

Mrs. Dallow appeared for a moment to reflect upon this: it was spoken in a tone that might have touched her. At any rate, at the end of the moment, lifting her eyes, she announced: "I hate art, as you call it. I thought I did, I knew I did; but till this morning I did n't know how much."

"Bless your soul, *that* was n't art," pleaded Nick. "The real thing will be a thousand miles away from us; it will never come into the house, *soyez tranquille.* Why then should you worry?"

"Because I want to understand, I want to know what I 'm doing. You 're an artist: you are, you are!" Mrs. Dallow cried, accusing him passionately.

"My poor Julia, it is n't so easy as that, nor a character one can take on from one day to the other. There are all sorts of things; one must be caught young, and put through the mill and see things as they are. There would be sacrifices I never can make."

"Well then, there are sacrifices for both of us, and I can't make them, either. I dare say it 's all right for you, but for me it would be a terrible mistake. When I think I 'm doing something I must n't do just the opposite," Julia went on, as if she wished to explain and be clear. "There are things I 've thought of, the things I like best; and they are not what you mean. It would be a great deception, and it 's not the way I see my life, and it would be misery if we don't understand."

Nick looked at her in hard perplexity, for she did not succeed in explaining as well as she wished. "If we don't understand what?"

"That we are awfully different — that you are doing it all for me."

"And is that an objection to me — what I do for you?" asked Nick.

"You do too much. You 're awfully good, you 're generous, you 're a dear fellow; but I don't believe in it. I did n't, at bottom, from the first — that 's why I made you wait, why I gave you your freedom. Oh, I 've suspected you. I had my ideas. It 's all right for you, but it won't do for me: I 'm different altogether. Why should

it always be put upon me, when I hate it? What have I done? I was drenched with it, before." These last words, as they broke forth, were accompanied, even as the speaker uttered them, with a quick blush; so that Nick could as quickly discern in them the uncalculated betrayal of an old irritation, an old shame almost — her late husband's flat, inglorious taste for pretty things, his indifference to every chance to play a public part. This had been the mortification of her youth, and it was indeed a perversity of fate that a new alliance should contain for her even an oblique demand for the same spirit of accommodation, impose on her the secret bitterness of the same concessions. As Nick stood there before her, struggling sincerely with the force that he now felt to be strong in her, the intense resolution to break with him, a force matured in a few hours, he read a riddle that hitherto had baffled him, saw a great mystery become simple. A personal passion for him had all but thrown her into his arms (the sort of thing that even a vain man — and Nick was not especially vain — might hesitate to recognize the strength of); held in check with a tension of the cord, at moments, of which he could still feel the vibration, by her deep, her rare ambition and arrested, at the last, only just in time to save her calculations. His present glimpse of the immense extent of these calculations did not make him think her cold or poor; there was in fact a positive strange heat

in them and they struck him rather as grand and high. The fact that she could drop him even while she longed for him — drop him because it was now fixed in her mind that he would not after all serve her determination to be associated, so far as a woman could, with great affairs; that she could postpone, and postpone to an uncertainty, the satisfaction of a gnawing tenderness and judge for the long run — this exhibition of will and courage, of the large plan that possessed her, commanded his admiration on the spot. He paid the heavy penalty of being a man of imagination; he was capable of far excursions of the spirit, disloyalties to habit and even to faith, and open to wondrous communications. He ached, for the moment, to convince her that he would achieve what he would n't, for the vision of his future that she had tried to entertain shone before him as a bribe and a challenge. It seemed to him there was nothing he could n't fancy enough, to be so fancied by her. Presently he said:

"You want to be sure the man you marry will be prime minister of England. But how can you be sure, with any one?"

"I can be sure some men won't," Mrs. Dallow replied.

"The only safe thing, perhaps, would be to marry Mr. Macgeorge," Nick suggested.

"Possibly not even him."

"You 're a prime minister yourself," Nick

answered. "To hold fast to you as I hold, to be determined to be of your party — is n't that political enough, since you are the incarnation of politics?"

"Ah, how you hate them!" Julia moaned. "I saw that when I saw you this morning. The whole place reeked of it."

"My dear child, the greatest statesmen have had their distractions. What do you make of my hereditary talent? That 's a tremendous force."

"It would n't carry you far." Then Mrs. Dallow added, "You must be a great artist." Nick gave a laugh at the involuntary contempt of this, but she went on: "It 's beautiful of you to want to give up anything, and I like you for it. I shall always like you. We shall be friends, and I shall always take an interest — "

He stopped her at this, made a movement which interrupted her phrase, and she suffered him to hold her hand as if she were not afraid of him now. "It is n't only for you," he argued, gently; "you 're a great deal, but you 're not everything. Innumerable vows and pledges repose upon my head. I 'm inextricably committed and dedicated. I was brought up in the temple; my father was a high priest, and I 'm a child of the Lord. And then the life itself — when *you* speak of it I feel stirred to my depths; it 's like a herald's trumpet. Fight *with* me, Julia — not against me! Be on my side, and we shall do everything. It *is* fascinating, to be a great

man before the people — to be loved by them, to be followed by them. An artist is n't — never, never. Why *should* he be? Don't forget how clever I am."

"Oh, if it was n't for that!" she rejoined, flushed with the effort to resist his tone. She asked abruptly, "Do you pretend that if I were to die to-morrow you would stay in the House?"

"If you were to die? God knows! But you do singularly little justice to my incentives," Nick continued. "My political career is everything to my mother."

Julia hesitated a moment; then she inquired: "Are you afraid of your mother?"

"Yes, particularly; for she represents infinite possibilities of disappointment and distress. She represents all my father's as well as all her own; and in them my father tragically lives again. On the other hand, I see him in bliss, as I see my mother, over our marriage and our life of common aspirations; though of course that 's not a consideration that I can expect to have power with you."

Mrs. Dallow shook her head slowly, even smiling a little, with an air of recovered calmness and lucidity. "You 'll never hold high office."

"But why not take me as I am?"

"Because I 'm abominably keen about that sort of thing; I must recognize it. I must face the ugly truth. I 've been through the worst; it 's all settled."

"The worst, I suppose, was when you found me this morning."

"Oh, that was all right — for you."

"You 're magnanimous, Julia; but evidently what 's good enough for me is n't good enough for you." Nick spoke with bitterness.

"I don't like you enough — that 's the obstacle," said Mrs. Dallow, bravely.

"You did a year ago; you confessed to it."

"Well, a year ago was a year ago. Things are changed to-day."

"You 're very fortunate — to be able to throw away a devotion," Nick replied.

Julia had her pocket handkerchief in her hand, and at this she quickly pressed it to her lips, as if to check an exclamation. Then, for an instant, she appeared to be listening as if for a sound from outside. Nick interpreted her movement as an honorable impulse to repress the words, "Do you mean the devotion that I was witness of this morning?" But immediately afterwards she said something very different: "I thought I heard a ring. I 've telegraphed for Mrs. Gresham."

"Why did you do that?" asked Nick.

"Oh, I want her."

He walked to the window, where the curtains had not been drawn, and saw in the dusk a cab at the door. When he turned back he said: "Why won't you trust me to make you like me, as you call it, better? If I make you like me

as well as I like you, it will be about enough, I think."

"Oh, I like you enough, for *your* happiness. And I don't throw away a devotion," Mrs. Dallow continued. "I shall be constantly kind to you. I shall be beautiful to you."

"You 'll make me lose a fortune," declared Nick.

Julia stared, then she colored. "Ah, you may have all the money you want."

"I don't mean yours," he answered, flushing in his turn. He had determined, on the instant, since it might serve, to tell her what he had never spoken of to her before. "Mr. Carteret last year promised me a pot of money on the day I should stand up with you. He has set his heart on our marriage."

"I 'm sorry to disappoint Mr. Carteret," said Julia. "I 'll go and see him. I 'll make it all right," she went on. "Besides, you 'll make a fortune by your portraits. The great men get a thousand, just for a head."

"I 'm only joking," Nick returned, with sombre eyes that contradicted this profession. "But what things you deserve I should do!"

"Do you mean striking likenesses?"

"You do hate it! Pushed to that point, it 's curious," the young man audibly mused.

"Do you mean you 're joking about Mr. Carteret's promise?"

"No, the promise is real; but I don't seriously offer it as a reason."

"I shall go to Beauclere," said Mrs. Dallow. "You're an hour late," she added in a different tone; for at that moment the door of the room was thrown open and Mrs. Gresham, the butler pronouncing her name, was ushered in.

"Ah, don't impugn my punctuality; it's my character!" the useful lady exclaimed, putting a sixpence from the cabman into her purse. Nick went off, at this, with a simplified farewell — went off foreseeing exactly what he found the next day, that Mrs. Gresham would have received orders not to budge from her hostess's side. He called on the morrow, late in the afternoon, and Julia saw him, liberally, in pursuance of her assertion that she would be "beautiful" to him, that she had not thrown away his devotion; but Mrs. Gresham remained, immutably, a spectator of her liberality. Julia looked at him kindly, but her companion was more benignant still; so that what Nick did with his own eyes was not to appeal to Mrs. Dallow to see him for a moment alone, but to solicit, in the name of this luxury, the second occupant of the drawing-room. Mrs. Gresham seemed to say, while Julia said very little: "I understand, my poor friend, I know everything (she has told me only *her* side, but I'm so competent that I know yours too), and I enter into the whole thing deeply. But it would be as much as my place is worth to accommodate you." Still, she did not go so far as to give him an inkling of what he learned on the third day

and what he had not gone so far as to suspect — that the two ladies had made rapid arrangements for a scheme of foreign travel. These arrangements had already been carried out when, at the door of the house in Great Stanhope Street, the fact was imparted to Nick that Mrs. Dallow and her friend had started that morning for Paris.

XXVIII.

On their way to Florence, Julia Dallow and Mrs. Gresham spent three days in Paris, where Peter Sherringham had as much conversation with his sister as it often befell one member of that family to have with another. That is, on two different occasions he enjoyed half an hour's gossip with her in her sitting-room at the hotel. On one of these occasions he took the liberty of asking her whether or no, definitely, she meant to marry Nick Dormer. Julia expressed to him that she was much obliged for his interest, but that Nick and she were nothing more than relations and good friends. "He wants to marry you, tremendously," Peter remarked; to which Mrs. Dallow simply made answer, "Well, then, he may want."

After this they sat silent for some moments, as if the subject had been quite threshed out between them. Peter felt no impulse to penetrate further, for it was not a habit of the Sherringhams to talk with each other of their love-affairs; and he was conscious of the particular deterrent that he and Julia had, in general, so different a way of feeling that they could never go far together in discussion. He liked her and was sorry for

her, thought her life lonely and wondered she did n't make a "great" marriage. Moreover, he pitied her for being without the interests and consolations that he had found substantial: those of the intellectual, the studious order he considered these to be, not knowing how much she supposed that she reflected and studied or what an education she had found in her political aspirations, regarded by him as scarcely more a personal part of her than the livery of her servants or the jewels George Dallow's money had bought. Her relations with Nick were unfathomable to him; but they were not his affair. No affair of Julia's was sufficiently his to justify him in an attempt to understand it. That there should have been any question of her marrying Nick was the anomaly to him, rather than that the question should have been dropped. He liked his clever cousin very well as he was — enough to have a vague sense that he might be spoiled by being altered into a brother-in-law. Moreover, though he was not perhaps distinctly conscious of this, Peter pressed lightly on Julia's doings, from a tacit understanding that in this case she would let him off as easily. He could not have said exactly what it was that he judged it pertinent to be let off from: perhaps from irritating inquiry as to whether he had given any more tea-parties for young ladies connected with the theatre.

Peter's forbearance, however, did not bring

him all the security he prefigured. After an interval he indeed went so far as to ask Julia if Nick had been wanting in respect to her; but this was a question intended for sympathy, not for control. She answered, "Dear, no — though he 's very provoking." Thus Peter guessed that they had had a quarrel, in which it did n't concern him to interpose: he added the epithet and her flight from England together, and they made up, to his perception, one of the little magnified embroilments which do duty for the real in superficial lives. It was worse to provoke Julia than not, and Peter thought Nick's doing so not particularly characteristic of his versatility for good. He might wonder why she did n't marry the member for Harsh, if the subject had come up; but he wondered still more why Nick did n't marry her. Julia said nothing, again, as if to give him a chance to make some inquiry which would save her from gushing; but as his idea appeared to be to change the subject, and as he changed it only by silence, she was reduced to resuming presently:

"I should have thought you would have come over to see your friend the actress."

"Which of my friends? I know so many actresses," Peter rejoined.

"The woman you inflicted on us in this place a year ago — the one who is in London now."

"Oh, Miriam Rooth? I should have liked to come over, but I have been tied fast. Have you seen her?"

"Yes, I've seen her."

"Do you like her?"

"Not at all."

"She has a lovely voice," Peter hazarded, after a moment.

"I don't know anything about her voice — I haven't heard it."

"But she doesn't act in pantomime, does she?"

"I don't know anything about her acting. I saw her in private — in Nick Dormer's studio."

"In Nick Dormer's studio? What was she doing there?"

"She was sprawling over the room and staring at me."

If Mrs. Dallow had wished to "draw" her brother, it is probable that at this point she suspected she had succeeded, in spite of the care he took to divest his tone of everything like emotion in uttering the words: "Why, does he know her so well? I didn't know."

"She is sitting to him for her portrait; at least she was then."

"Oh, yes, I remember: I put him up to that. I'm greatly interested. Is the portrait good?"

"I haven't the least idea — I didn't look at it. I dare say it's clever," Julia added.

"How in the world does Nick find time to paint?"

"I don't know. That horrid man brought her."

"What horrid man?" Peter demanded.

"The one Nick thinks so clever — the vulgar little man who was at your place that day and tried to talk to me. I remember he abused theatrical people to me — as if I cared anything about them. But he has, apparently, something to do with this girl."

"Oh, I recollect him — I had a discussion with him," Peter said.

"How could you? I must go and dress," Julia went on.

"He *was* clever, remarkably. Miss Rooth and her mother were old friends of his, and he was the first person to speak of them to me."

"What a distinction! I thought him disgusting!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallow, who was pressed for time and who had now got up.

"Oh, you 're severe," said Peter; but as they separated she had given him something to think of.

That Nick was painting a beautiful actress was, no doubt, in part at least, the reason why he was provoking and why his most intimate female friend had come abroad. The fact did not render him provoking to Peter Sherringham: on the contrary, Peter had been quite sincere when he qualified it as interesting. It became, indeed, on reflection, so interesting that it had perhaps almost as much to do with Sherringham's rush over to London as it had to do with Julia's coming away. Reflection taught Peter, further, that

the matter was altogether a delicate one, and suggested that it was odd he should be mixed up with it in fact, when, as Julia's business, he had wished only to keep out of it. It was his own business a little too: there was somehow a still more pointed implication of that in his sister's saying to him the next day that she wished immensely he would take a fancy to Biddy Dormer. She said more: she said there had been a time when she believed he *had* done so — believed too that the poor child herself had believed the same. Biddy was far away the nicest girl she knew — the dearest, sweetest, cleverest, *best*, and one of the prettiest creatures in England, which never spoiled anything. She would make as charming a wife as ever a man had, suited to any position, however high, and (Julia did n't mind mentioning it, since Peter would believe it whether she mentioned it or no) was so predisposed in his favor that he would have no trouble at all. In short, she herself would see him through — she would answer for it that he would only have to speak. Biddy's life at home was horrid; she was very sorry for her — the child was worthy of a better fate. Peter wondered what constituted the horridness of Biddy's life, and perceived that it mainly arose from the fact that Julia disliked Lady Agnes and Grace; profiting comfortably by the freedom to do so conferred upon her by her having given them a house of which she had perhaps not felt the want till they were in pos-

session of it. He knew she had always liked Biddy, but he asked himself (this was the rest of his wonder) why she had taken to liking her so extraordinarily just now. He liked her himself — he even liked to be talked to about her and he could believe everything Julia said: the only thing that mystified him was her motive for suddenly saying it. He assured her that he was infinitely indebted to her for her expenditure of imagination on his behalf, but that he was sorry if he had put it into any one's head (most of all into the girl's own) that he had looked at Biddy with a covetous eye. He knew not whether she would make a good wife, but he liked her quite too much to wish to put such a ticklish matter to the test. She was surely not intended for cruel experiments. As it happened, he was not thinking of marrying any one — he had ever so many reasons against it. Of course one was never safe against accidents, but one could at least take precautions, and he did n't mind telling her that there were several he *had* taken.

"I don't know what you mean, but it seems to me quite the best precaution would be to care for a charming, steady girl like Biddy," Mrs. Dallow replied. "Then you would be quite in shelter, you would know the worst that can happen to you, and it would n't be bad." The objection Peter had made to this argument is not important, especially as it was not remarkably candid; it need only be mentioned that before he and

Julia parted she said to him, still in reference to Bridget Dormer: "Do go and see her and be nice to her: she 'll save you disappointments."

These last words reverberated in Sherringham's mind; there was a shade of the portentous in them and they seemed to proceed from a larger knowledge of the subject than he himself as yet possessed. They were not absent from his memory when, in the beginning of May, availing himself, to save time, of the night-service, he crossed from Paris to London. He arrived before the breakfast hour and went to his sister's house in Great Stanhope Street, where he always found quarters, whether she were in town or not. If she were at home she welcomed him, and if she were not the relaxed servants hailed him for the chance he gave them to recover their "form." In either case his allowance of space was large and his independence complete. He had obtained permission this year to take in fractions instead of as a single draught the leave of absence to which he was entitled; and there was, moreover, a question of his being transferred to another embassy, in which event he believed that he might count upon a month or two in England before proceeding to his new post.

He waited, after breakfast, but a very few minutes before jumping into a hansom and rattling away to the north. A part of his waiting indeed consisted of a fidgety walk up Bond Street, during which he looked at his watch three or four

times while he paused at shop windows for fear of being a little early. In the cab, as he rolled along, after having given an address, — Balaklava Place, St. John's Wood, — the fear that he should be too early took, curiously, at moments, the form of a fear that he should be too late: a symbol of the inconsistencies of which his spirit at present was full. Peter Sherringham was nervous, too nervous for a diplomatist, and haunted with inclinations, and indeed with purposes, which contradicted each other. He wanted to be out of it and yet he dreaded not to be in it, and on this particular occasion the sense of exclusion made him sore. At the same time he was not unconscious of the impulse to stop his cab and make it turn round and drive due south. He saw himself launched in the breezy fact while, morally speaking, he was hauled up on the hot sand of the principle, and he had the intelligence to perceive how little these two faces of the same idea had in common. However, as the sense of movement encouraged him to reflect, a principle was a poor affair if it remained mere inaction. Yet from the moment it turned to action it manifestly could only be the particular action in which he was engaged; so that he was in the absurd position of thinking his behavior more consummate for the reason that it was directly opposed to his intentions.

He had kept away from London ever since Miriam Rooth came over; resisting curiosity,

sympathy, importunate haunting passion, and considering that his resistance, founded, to be salutary, on a general scheme of life, was the greatest success he had yet achieved. He was deeply occupied with plucking up the feeling that attached him to her, and he had already, by various little ingénuities, loosened some of its roots. He suffered her to make her first appearance on any stage without the comfort of his voice or the applause of his hand; saying to himself that the man who could do the more could do the less and that such an act of fortitude was a proof he should keep straight. It was not exactly keeping straight to run over to London three months later and, the hour he arrived, scramble off to Balaklava Place; but after all he pretended only to be human and aimed, in behavior, only at the heroic, not at the monstrous. The highest heroism was three parts tact. He had not written to Miriam that he was coming to England and would call upon her at eleven o'clock in the morning, because it was his secret pride that he had ceased to correspond with her. Sherringham took his prudence where he could find it, and in doing so was rather like a drunkard who should flatter himself that he had forsworn liquor because he did n't touch lemonade.

It is an example of how much he was drawn in different directions at once that when, on reaching Balaklava Place and alighting at the door of a small much-ivied house which resembled a gate-

lodge bereft of its park, he learned that Miss Rooth had only a quarter of an hour before quitted the spot with her mother (they had gone to the theatre, to rehearsal, said the maid who answered the bell he had set tinkling behind a dingy plastered wall): when at the end of his pilgrimage he was greeted by a disappointment he suddenly found himself relieved and, for the moment, even saved. Providence was after all taking care of him and he submitted to Providence. He would still be watched over doubtless, even if he should follow the two ladies to the theatre, send in his card and obtain admission to the histrionic workshop. All his old technical interest in the girl's development flamed up again, and he wondered what she was rehearsing, what she was to do next. He got back into his hansom and drove down the Edgware Road. By the time he reached the Marble Arch he had changed his mind again — he had determined to let Miriam alone for that day. The day would be over at eight o'clock in the evening (he hardly played fair), and then he should consider himself free. Instead of going to the theatre he drove to a shop in Bond Street, to take a place for the play. On first coming out he had tried, at one of those establishments strangely denominated "libraries," to get a stall, but the people to whom he applied were unable to accommodate him — they had not a single seat left. His second attempt, at another "library," was more successful: he was unable to

obtain a stall, but by a miracle he might have a box. There was a certain wantonness in paying for a box to see a play on which he had already expended four hundred pounds; but while he was mentally measuring this abyss an idea came into his head which flushed the extravagance with a slight rose-tint.

Peter came out of the shop with the voucher for the box in his pocket, turned into Piccadilly, noted that the day was growing warm and fine, felt glad that this time he had no business, unless it were business to leave a card or two on official people, and asked himself where he should go if he did n't go after Miriam. Then it was that it struck him as most acutely desirable, and even most important, that he should see Nick Dormer's portrait of her. He wondered which would be the natural place at that hour of the day to look for the artist. The House of Commons was perhaps the nearest one, but Nick, incongruous as his proceedings certainly were, probably did n't keep the picture there; and moreover it was not generally characteristic of him to be in the natural place. The end of Peter's debate was that he again entered a hansom and drove to Calcutta Gardens. The hour was early for calling, but cousins with whom one's intercourse was mainly a conversational scuffle would accept it as a practical illustration of that method. And if Julia wanted him to be nice to Biddy (which was exactly, though with a different view, what he

wanted himself), what could be nicer than to pay his visit to Lady Agnes (he would have in decency to go to see her some time), at a friendly, fraternizing hour, when they would all be likely to be at home?

Unfortunately, as it turned out, they were not at home, so that Peter had to fall back on neutrality and the butler, who was, however, more luckily, an old friend. Her ladyship and Miss Dormer were absent from town, paying a visit; and Mr. Dormer was also away, or was on the point of going away for the day. Miss Bridget was in London, but was out: Peter's informant mentioned with earnest vagueness that he thought she had gone somewhere to take a lesson. On Peter's asking what sort of lesson he meant, he replied, "Oh, I think — a — the a-sculpture, you know, sir." Peter knew, but Biddy's lesson in "a-sculpture" (it sounded, on the butler's lips, like a fashionable new art) struck him a little as a mockery of the benevolent spirit in which he had come to look her up. The man had an air of participating respectfully in his disappointment and, to make up for it, added that he might perhaps find Mr. Dormer at his other address. He had gone out early and had directed his servant to come to Rosedale Road in an hour or two with a portmanteau: he was going down to Beauclere in the course of the day, Mr. Carteret being ill — perhaps Mr. Sherringham did n't know it. Perhaps, too, Mr. Sherringham would

catch him in Rosedale Road before he took his train — he was to have been busy there for an hour. This was worth trying, and Peter immediately drove to Rosedale Road ; where, in answer to his ring, the door was opened to him by Biddy Dormer.

XXIX.

When Biddy saw him her cheek exhibited the prettiest pleased, surprised red that he had ever observed there, though he was not unacquainted with its fluctuations, and she stood still, smiling at him with the outer dazzle in her eyes, making no motion for him to enter. She only said, "Oh, Peter!" And then, "I 'm all alone."

"So much the better, dear Biddy. Is that any reason I should n't come in?"

"Dear, no — do come in. You 've just missed Nick; he has gone to the country — half an hour ago." She had on a large apron, and in her hand she carried a small stick, besmeared, as his quick eye saw, with modeling-clay. She dropped the door and fled back before him into the studio, where, when he followed her, she was in the act of flinging a cloth over a rough head, in clay, which, in the middle of the room, was supported on a high wooden stand. The effort to hide what she had been doing before he caught a glimpse of it made her redder still and led to her smiling more, to her laughing with a charming confusion of shyness and gladness. She rubbed her hands on her apron, she pulled it off, she looked delightfully awkward, not meeting Peter's eye, and she

said: "I'm just scraping here a little — you must n't mind me. What I do is awful, you know. Peter, please don't look. I 've been coming here lately to make my little mess, because mamma does n't particularly like it at home. I 've had a lesson from a lady who exhibits ; but you would n't suppose it, to see what I do. Nick 's so kind ; he lets me come here ; he uses the studio so little ; I do what I please. What a pity he 's gone — he would have been so glad. I 'm really alone — I hope you don't mind. Peter, *please* don't look."

Peter was not bent upon looking ; his eyes had occupation enough in Biddy's own agreeable aspect, which was full of an unusual element of domestication and responsibility. Though she had taken possession, by exception, of her brother's quarters, she struck her visitor as more at home and more herself than he had ever seen her. It was the first time she had been, to his vision, so separate from her mother and sister. She seemed to know this herself and to be a little frightened by it — just enough to make him wish to be reassuring. At the same time Peter also, on this occasion, found himself touched with diffidence, especially after he had gone back and closed the door and settled down to a regular visit ; for he became acutely conscious of what Julia had said to him in Paris and was unable to rid himself of the suspicion that it had been said with Biddy's knowledge. It was not that he supposed his sister had told the girl that she meant

to do what she could to make him propose to her: that would have been cruel to her (if she liked him enough to consent), in Julia's uncertainty. But Biddy participated by imagination, by divination, by a clever girl's secret tremulous instincts, in her good friend's views about her, and this probability constituted for Sherringham a sort of embarrassing publicity. He had impressions, possibly gross and unjust, in regard to the way women move constantly together amid such considerations and subtly intercommunicate, when they do not still more subtly dissemble, the hopes or fears of which persons of the opposite sex form the subject. Therefore poor Biddy would know that if she failed to strike him in the right light it would not be for want of his attention having been called to her claims. She would have been tacitly rejected, virtually condemned. Peter could not, without a slight sense of fatuity, endeavor to make up for this to her by kindness; he was aware that if any one knew it a man would be ridiculous who should take so much as that for granted. But no one would know it: oddly enough, in this calculation of security he left Biddy herself out. It did not occur to him that she might have a secret small irony to spare for his ingenious and magnanimous impulse to show her how much he liked her in order to make her forgive him for not liking her more. This magnanimity, at any rate, colored the whole of Sherringham's visit to Rosedale Road, the whole

of the pleasant, prolonged chat that kept him there for more than an hour. He begged the girl to go on with her work, not to let him interrupt it; and she obliged him at last, taking the cloth off the lump of clay and giving him a chance to be delightful by guessing that the shapeless mass was intended, or would be intended after a while, for Nick. He saw that she was more comfortable when she began to smooth it and scrape it with her little stick again, to manipulate it with an ineffectual air of knowing how; for this gave her something to do, relieved her nervousness and permitted her to turn away from him when she talked.

Peter walked about the room and sat down; got up and looked at Nick's things; watched her at moments in silence (which made her always say, in a minute, that he was not to look at her so, or she could do nothing); observed how her position, before her high stand, her lifted arms, her turns of the head, considering her work this way and that, all helped her to be pretty. She repeated again and again that it was an immense pity about Nick, till he was obliged to say he did n't care a straw for Nick: he was perfectly content with the company he found. This was not the sort of thing he thought it right, under the circumstances, to say; but then even the circumstances did not require him to pretend he liked her less than he did. After all she was his cousin; she would cease to be so if she should

become his wife; but one advantage of her not entering into that relation was precisely that she would remain his cousin. It was very pleasant to find a young, bright, slim, rose-colored kinswoman all ready to recognize consanguinity when one came back from cousinless foreign lands. Peter talked about family matters; he did n't know, in his exile, where no one took an interest in them, what a fund of latent curiosity about them was in him. It was in him to gossip about them and to enjoy the sense that he and Biddy had indefeasible properties in common — ever so many things as to which they would understand each other *à demi-mot*. He smoked a cigarette because she begged him to, said that people always smoked in studios — it made her feel so much more like an artist. She apologized for the badness of her work on the ground that Nick was so busy he could scarcely ever give her a sitting; so that she had to do the head from photographs and occasional glimpses. They had hoped to be able to put in an hour that morning, but news had suddenly come that Mr. Carteret was worse, and Nick had hurried down to Beauclere. Mr. Carteret was very ill, poor old dear, and Nick and he were immense friends. Nick had always been charming to him. Peter and Biddy took the concerns of the houses of Dormer and Sherringham in order, and the young man felt after a little as if they were as wise as a French *conseil de famille*, settling what was best

for every one. He heard all about Lady Agnes and manifested an interest in the detail of her existence that he had not supposed himself to possess, though indeed Biddy threw out intimations which excited his curiosity, presenting her mother in a light that might call upon his sympathy.

"I don't think she has been very happy or very pleased, of late," the girl said. "I think she has had some disappointments, poor dear mamma; and Grace has made her go out of town for three or four days, for a little change. They have gone down to see an old lady, Lady St. Dunstans, who never comes to London now, and who, you know — she's tremendously old — was papa's godmother. It's not very lively for Grace, but Grace is such a dear she'll do anything for mamma. Mamma will go anywhere to see people she can talk with about papa."

Biddy added, in reply to a further inquiry from Peter, that what her mother was disappointed about was — well, themselves, her children and all their affairs; and she explained that Lady Agnes wanted all kinds of things for them that didn't come to them, that they didn't get or seem likely to get, so that their life appeared altogether a failure. She wanted a great deal, Biddy admitted; she really wanted everything and she had thought in her happier days that everything was to be hers. She loved them all so much, and then she was proud: she couldn't

get over the thought of their not being successful. Sherringham was unwilling to press, at this point, for he suspected one of the things that Lady Agnes wanted; but Biddy relieved him a little by saying that one of these things was that Grace should get married.

"That 's too unselfish of her," rejoined Peter, who did n't care for Grace. "Cousin Agnes ought to keep her near her always, if Grace is so obliging and devoted."

"Oh, mamma would give up anything of that sort for our good; she would n't sacrifice us that way!" Biddy exclaimed. "Besides, I 'm the one to stay with mamma; not that I can manage and look after her and do everything so well as Grace. But, you know, I want to," said Biddy, with a liquid note in her voice, giving her lump of clay a little stab.

"But does n't your mother want the rest of you to get married — Percival and Nick and you?" Peter asked.

"Oh, she has given up Percy. I don't suppose she thinks it would do. Dear Nick, of course — that 's just what she does want."

Sherringham hesitated. "And you, Biddy?"

"Oh, I dare say; but that does n't signify — I never shall."

Peter got up, at this; the tone of it set him in motion and he took a turn round the room. He said something to her about her being too proud; to which she replied that that was the only thing for a girl to be, to get on.

"What do you mean by getting on?" Peter demanded, stopping, with his hands in his pockets, on the other side of the studio.

"I mean crying one's eyes out!" Biddy unexpectedly exclaimed; but she drowned the effect of this pathetic paradox in a foolish laugh and in the quick declaration: "Of course it's about Nick that poor mother's really broken-hearted."

"What's the matter with Nick?" Sherringham asked, diplomatically.

"Oh, Peter, what's the matter with Julia?" Biddy quavered softly, back to him, with eyes suddenly frank and mournful. "I dare say you know what we all hoped — what we all supposed, from what they told us. And now they won't!" said Biddy.

"Yes, Biddy, I know. I had the brightest prospect of becoming your brother-in-law: would n't that have been it — or something like that? But it is indeed visibly clouded. What's the matter with them? May I have another cigarette?" Peter came back to the wide, cushioned bench where he had been lounging: this was the way they took up the subject he wanted most to look into. "Don't they know how to love?" he went on, as he seated himself again.

"It seems a kind of fatality!" sighed Biddy.

Peter said nothing for some moments, at the end of which he inquired whether his companion were to be quite alone during her mother's absence. She replied that her mother was very

droll about that — she would never leave her alone: she thought something dreadful would happen to her. She had therefore arranged that Florence Tressilian should come and stay in Calcutta Gardens for the next few days, to look after her and see she did no wrong. Peter asked who Florence Tressilian might be: he greatly hoped, for the success of Lady Agnes's precautions, that she was not a flighty young genius like Biddy. She was described to him as tremendously nice and tremendously clever, but also tremendously old and tremendously safe; with the addition that Biddy was tremendously fond of her and that while she remained in Calcutta Gardens they expected to enjoy themselves tremendously. She was to come that afternoon, before dinner.

"And are you to dine at home?" said Peter.

"Certainly; where else?"

"And just you two, alone? Do you call that enjoying yourselves tremendously?"

"It will do for me. No doubt I ought n't, in modesty, to speak for poor Florence."

"It is n't fair to her; you ought to invite some one to meet her."

"Do you mean you, Peter?" the girl asked, turning to him quickly, with a look that vanished the instant he caught it.

"Try me; I 'll come like a shot."

"That 's kind," said Biddy, dropping her hands and now resting her eyes on him gratefully. She remained in this position a moment, as if she

were under a charm; then she jerked herself back to her work with the remark: "Florence will like that immensely."

"I'm delighted to please Florence, your description of her is so attractive!" Sherringham laughed. And when the girl asked him if he minded if there were not a great feast, because when her mother went away she allowed her a fixed amount for that sort of thing and, as he might imagine, it was n't millions — when Biddy, with the frankness of their pleasant kinship, touched anxiously on this economical point (illustrating, as Peter saw, the lucidity with which Lady Agnes had had in her old age to learn to recognize the occasions when she could be conveniently frugal), he answered that the shortest dinners were the best, especially when one was going to the theatre. That was his case to-night, and did Biddy think he might look to Miss Tressilian to go with him? They would have to dine early; he wanted not to miss a moment.

"The theatre — Miss Tressilian?" Biddy stared, interrupted and in suspense again.

"Would it incommode you very much to dine say at 7.15 and accept a place in my box? The finger of Providence was in it when I took a box an hour ago. I particularly like your being free to go — if you are free."

Biddy became fairly incoherent with pleasure. "Dear Peter, how good you are! They 'll have it at any hour. Florence will be so glad."

"And has Florence seen Miss Rooth?"

"Miss Rooth?" the girl repeated, redder than before. He perceived in a moment that she had heard that he had devoted much time and attention to that young lady. It was as if she were conscious that he would be conscious in speaking of her, and there was a sweetness in her allowance for him on that score. But Biddy was more confused for him than he was for himself. He guessed in a moment how much she had thought over what she had heard; this was indicated by her saying vaguely, "No, no, I've not seen her." Then she became aware that she was answering a question he had not asked her, and she went on: "We shall be too delighted. I saw her — perhaps you remember — in your rooms in Paris. I thought her so wonderful then! Every one is talking of her here. But we don't go to the theatre much, you know: we don't have boxes offered us except when *you* come. Poor Nick is too much taken up in the evening. I've wanted awfully to see her. They say she's magnificent."

"I don't know," said Peter. "I haven't seen her."

"You haven't seen her?"

"Never, Biddy. I mean on the stage. In private, often — yes," Sherringham added, conscientiously.

"Oh!" Biddy exclaimed, bending her face on Nick's bust again. She asked him no question

about the new star, and he offered her no further information. There were things in his mind that pulled him different ways, so that for some minutes silence was the result of the conflict. At last he said, after an hesitation caused by the possibility that she was ignorant of the fact he had lately elicited from Julia, though it was more probable she might have learned it from the same source:

"Am I perhaps indiscreet in alluding to the circumstance that Nick has been painting Miss Rooth's portrait?"

"You are not indiscreet in alluding to it to me, because I know it."

"Then there 's no secret nor mystery about it?"

Biddy considered a moment. "I don't think mamma knows it."

"You mean you have been keeping it from her because she would n't like it?"

"We 're afraid she may think that papa would n't have liked it."

This was said with an absence of humor which for an instant moved Sherringham to mirth; but he quickly recovered himself, repenting of any apparent failure of respect to the high memory of his late celebrated relative. He rejoined quickly, but rather vaguely: "Ah, yes, I remember that great man's ideas;" and then he went on: "May I ask if you know it, the fact that we are talking of, through Julia or through Nick?"

"I know it from both of them."

"Then, if you're in their confidence, may I further ask whether this undertaking of Nick's is the reason why things seem to be at an end between them?"

"Oh, I don't think she likes it," returned Biddy.

"Is n't it good?"

"Oh, I don't mean the picture — she has n't seen it; but his having done it."

"Does she dislike it so much that that 's why she won't marry him?"

Biddy gave up her work, moving away from it to look at it. She came and sat down on the long bench on which Sherringham had placed himself. Then she broke out: "Oh, Peter, it 's a great trouble — it 's a very great trouble; and I can't tell you, for I don't understand it."

"If I ask you, it 's not to pry into what does n't concern me; but Julia is my sister, and I can't, after all, help taking some interest in her life. But she tells me very little. She does n't think me worthy."

"Ah, poor Julia!" Biddy murmured, defensively. Her tone recalled to him that Julia had thought him worthy to unite himself to Bridget Dormer, and inevitably betrayed that the girl was thinking of that also. While they both thought of it they sat looking into each other's eyes.

"Nick, I'm sure, does n't treat *you* that way; I'm sure he confides in you; he talks to you

about his occupations, his ambitions," Peter continued. "And you understand him, you enter into them, you are nice to him, you help him."

"Oh, Nick's life — it's very dear to me," said Biddy.

"That must be jolly for him."

"It makes *me* very happy."

Peter uttered a low, ambiguous groan; then he exclaimed, with irritation: "What the deuce is the matter with them then? Why can't they hit it off and be quiet and rational and do what every one wants them to do?"

"Oh, Peter, it's awfully complicated," said Biddy, with sagacity.

"Do you mean that Nick's in love with her?"

"In love with Julia?"

"No, no, with Miriam Rooth."

Biddy shook her head slowly; then with a smile which struck him as one of the sweetest things he had ever seen (it conveyed, at the expense of her own prospects, such a shy, generous little mercy of reassurance): "He is n't, Peter," she declared. "Julia thinks it's trifling — all that sort of thing," she added. "She wants him to go in for different honors."

"Julia's the oddest woman. I thought she loved him," Sherringham remarked. "And when you love a person —" He continued to reflect, leaving his sentence impatiently unfinished, while Biddy, with lowered eyes, sat waiting (it interested her) to learn what you did when

you loved a person. "I can't conceive her giving him up. He has great ability, besides being such a good fellow."

"It 's for his happiness, Peter — that 's the way she reasons," Biddy explained. "She does it for an idea ; she has told me a great deal about it, and I see the way she feels."

"You try to, Biddy, because you are such a dear good-natured girl, but I don't believe you do in the least. It 's too little the way you yourself would feel. Julia's idea, as you call it, must be curious."

"Well, it is, Peter," Biddy mournfully admitted. "She won't risk not coming out at the top."

"At the top of what ? "

"Oh, of everything." Biddy's tone showed a trace of awe of such high views.

"Surely one 's at the top of everything when one 's in love."

"I don't know," said the girl.

"Do you doubt it ?" Sherringham demanded.

"I have never been in love and I never shall be."

"You 're as perverse, in your way, as Julia. But I confess I don't understand Nick's attitude any better. He seems to me, if I may say so, neither fish nor flesh."

"Oh, his attitude is very noble, Peter ; his state of mind is wonderfully interesting," Biddy pleaded. "Surely *you* must be in favor of art," she said.

Sherringham looked at her a moment. "Dear Biddy, your little digs are as soft as zephyrs."

She colored, but she protested. "My little digs? What do you mean? Are you not in favor of art?"

"The question is delightfully simple. I don't know what you're talking about. Everything has its place. A parliamentary life scarcely seems to me the situation for portrait-painting."

"That's just what Nick says."

"You talk of it together a great deal?"

"Yes, Nick's very good to me."

"Clever Nick! And what do you advise him?"

"Oh, to *do* something."

"That's valuable," Peter laughed. "Not to give up his sweetheart for the sake of a paint-pot, I hope?"

"Never, never, Peter! It's not a question of his giving up, for Julia has herself drawn back. I think she never really felt safe; she loved him, but she was afraid of him. Now she's only afraid — she has lost the confidence she tried to have. Nick has tried to hold her, but she has jerked herself away. Do you know what she said to me? She said, 'My confidence has gone forever.'"

"I didn't know she was such a prig!" Sherringham exclaimed. "They're queer people, verily, with water in their veins instead of blood. You and I wouldn't be like that, should we?

though you *have* taken up such a discouraging position, about caring for a fellow."

"I care for art," poor Biddy returned.

"You do, to some purpose," said Peter, glancing at the bust.

"To that of making you laugh at me."

"Would you give a good man up for that?"

"A good man? What man?"

"Well, say me — if I wanted to marry you."

Biddy hesitated a little. "Of course I would, in a moment. At any rate, I'd give up the House of Commons. That's what Nick's going to do now — only you must n't tell any one."

Sherringham stared. "He's going to chuck up his seat?"

"I think his mind is made up to it. He has talked me over — we have had some deep discussions. Yes, I'm on the side of art!" said Biddy, ardently.

"Do you mean in order to paint — to paint Miss Rooth?" Peter went on.

"To paint every one — that's what he wants. By keeping his seat he has n't kept Julia, and she was the thing he cared most for, in public life. When he has got out of the whole thing his attitude, as he says, will be at least clear. He's tremendously interesting about it, Peter; he has talked to me wonderfully; he *has* won me over. Mamma's heart-broken; telling her will be the hardest part."

"If she does n't know, why is she heart-broken?"

"Oh, at the marriage not coming off — she knows that. That's what she wanted. She thought it perfection. She blames Nick fearfully. She thinks he held the whole thing in his hand and that he has thrown away a magnificent opportunity."

"And what does Nick say to her?"

"He says, 'Dear old mummy!'"

"That's good," said Sherringham.

"I don't know what will become of her when this other blow arrives," Biddy pursued. "Poor Nick wants to please her — he does, he does. But, as he says, you can't please every one, and you must, before you die, please yourself a little."

Peter Sherringham sat looking at the floor; the color had risen to his face while he listened to the girl. Then he sprang up and took another turn about the room. His companion's artless but vivid recital had set his blood in motion. He had taken Nick's Dormer's political prospects very much for granted, thought of them as definite and brilliant and seductive. To learn there was something for which he was ready to renounce such honors, and to recognize the nature of that bribe, affected Sherringham powerfully and strangely. He felt as if he had heard the sudden blare of a trumpet, and he felt at the same time as if he had received a sudden slap in the face. Nick's bribe was "art" — the strange temptress with whom he himself had been wrestling and over whom he had finally ventured to

believe that wisdom and training had won a victory. There was something in the conduct of his old friend and playfellow that made all his reasonings small. Nick's unexpected choice acted on him as a reproach and a challenge. He felt ashamed at having placed himself so unromantically on his guard, and rapidly said to himself that if Nick could afford to allow so much for "art" he might surely exhibit some of the same confidence. There had never been the least avowed competition between the cousins — their lines lay too far apart for that; but nevertheless they rode in sight of each other, and Sherringham had at present the sensation of suddenly seeing Nick Dormer give his horse the spur, bound forward and fly over a wall. He was put on his mettle and he had not to look long to spy an obstacle that he too might ride at. High rose his curiosity to see what warrant his kinsman might have for such risks — how he was mounted for such exploits. He really knew little about Nick's talent — so little as to feel no right to exclaim "What an ass!" when Biddy gave him the news which only the existence of real talent could redeem from absurdity. All his eagerness to ascertain what Nick had been able to make of such a subject as Miriam Rooth came back to him; though it was what mainly had brought him to Rosedale Road he had forgotten it in the happy accident of his encounter with Biddy. He was conscious that if the surprise of a revelation

of power were in store for him Nick would be justified more than he himself would feel reinstated in his self-respect. For the courage of renouncing the forum for the studio hovered before him as greater than the courage of marrying an actress whom one was in love with: the reward, in the latter case, was so much more immediate. Peter asked Biddy what Nick had done with his portrait of Miriam. He had n't seen it anywhere in rummaging about the room.

"I think it 's here somewhere, but I don't know," Biddy replied, getting up and looking vaguely round her.

"Have n't you seen it? Has n't he shown it to you?"

The girl rested her eyes on him strangely a moment; then she turned them away from him with a mechanical air of seeking for the picture. "I think it 's in the room, put away with its face to the wall."

"One of those dozen canvases with their backs to us?"

"One of those perhaps."

"Have n't you tried to see?"

"I have n't touched them," said Biddy, coloring.

"Has n't Nick had it out to show you?"

"He says it 's in too bad a state — it is n't finished — it won't do."

"And have n't you had the curiosity to turn it round for yourself?"

The embarrassed look in poor Biddy's face deepened, and it seemed to Sherringham that her eyes pleaded with him a moment, that there was a menace of tears in them, a gleam of anguish. "I have had an idea he would n't like it."

Her visitor's own desire, however, had become too lively for easy forbearance. He laid his hand on two or three canvases which proved, as he extricated them, to be either blank or covered with rudimentary forms. "Dear Biddy, are you as docile, as obliging, as that?" he asked, pulling out something else.

The inquiry was meant in familiar kindness, for Peter was struck, even to admiration, with the girl's having a sense of honor which all girls have not. She must in this particular case have longed for a sight of Nick's work — the work which had brought about such a crisis in his life. But she had passed hours in his studio alone, without permitting herself a stolen peep; she was capable of that if she believed it would please him. Sherringham liked a charming girl's being capable of that (he had known charming girls who would not have been), and his question was really an expression of respect. Biddy, however, apparently discovered some light mockery in it, and she broke out, incongruously:

"I have n't wanted so much to see it. I don't care for her so much as that."

"So much as that?"

"I don't care for his actress — for that vulgar

creature. I don't like her!" said Biddy, unexpectedly.

Peter stared. "I thought you had n't seen her."

"I saw her in Paris — twice. She was wonderfully clever, but she did n't charm me."

Sherringham quickly considered, and then he said benevolently: "I won't inflict the picture upon you, then; we 'll leave it alone for the present." Biddy made no reply to this at first, but after a moment she went straight over to the row of stacked canvases and exposed several of them to the light. "Why did you say you wished to go to the theatre to-night?" her companion continued.

Still the girl was silent; then she exclaimed, with her back turned to him and a little tremor in her voice, while she drew forth one of her brother's studies after the other: "For the sake of your company, Peter! Here it is, I think," she added, moving a large canvas with some effort. "No, no, I 'll hold it for you. Is that the light?"

She would n't let him take it; she bade him stand off and allow her to place it in the right position. In this position she carefully presented it, supporting it, at the proper angle, from behind and showing her head and shoulders above it. From the moment his eyes rested on the picture Sherringham accepted this service without protest. Unfinished, simplified and in some portions

merely suggested, it was strong, brilliant and vivid, and had already the look of life and the air of an original thing. Sherringham was startled, he was strangely affected — he had no idea Nick moved with that stride. Miriam was represented in three quarters, seated, almost down to her feet. She leaned forward, with one of her legs crossed over the other, her arms extended and foreshortened, her hands locked together round her knee. Her beautiful head was bent a little, broodingly, and her splendid face seemed to look down at life. She had a grand appearance of being raised aloft, with a wide regard, from a height of intelligence, for the great field of the artist, all the figures and passions he may represent. Peter wondered where his kinsman had learned to paint like that. He almost gasped at the composition of the thing, at the drawing of the moulded arms. Biddy Dormer abstained from looking round the corner of the canvas as she held it; she only watched, in Peter's eyes, for *his* impression of it. This she easily caught, and he could see that she had done so when, after a few minutes, he went to relieve her. She let him lift the thing out of her grasp; he moved it and rested it, so that they could still see it, against the high back of a chair. "It 's tremendously good," he said.

"Dear, dear Nick," Biddy murmured, looking at it now.

"Poor, poor Julia!" Sherringham was prompted

to exclaim in a different tone. His companion made no rejoinder to this, and they stood another minute or two side by side, in silence, gazing at the portrait. Then Sherringham took up his hat — he had no more time, he must go. "Will you come to-night, all the same?" he asked, with a laugh that was somewhat awkward, putting out his hand to Biddy.

"All the same?"

"Why, you say she 's a terrible creature," Peter went on, with his eyes on the painted face.

"Oh, anything for art!" said Biddy, smiling.

"Well, at seven o'clock then." And Sherringham went away immediately, leaving the girl alone with the Tragic Muse and feeling again, with a quickened rush, a sense of the beauty of Miriam, as well as a new comprehension of the talent of Nick.

XXX.

It was not till noon, or rather later, the next day, that Sherringham saw Miriam Rooth. He wrote her a note that evening, to be delivered to her at the theatre, and during the performance she sent round to him a card with "'All right — come to luncheon to-morrow," scrawled upon it in pencil.

When he presented himself in Balaklava Place he learned that the two ladies had not come in — they had gone again, early, to rehearsal; but they had left word that he was to be pleased to wait — they would come in from one moment to the other. It was further mentioned to him, as he was ushered into the drawing-room, that Mr. Dashwood was on the ground. This circumstance, however, Sherringham barely noted: he had been soaring so high for the past twelve hours that he had almost lost consciousness of the minor differences of earthly things. He had taken Biddy Dormer and her friend Miss Tressilian home from the play, and after leaving them he had walked about the streets, he had roamed back to his sister's house, in a state of exultation deepened by the fact that all the evening he had contained himself, thinking it more decorous and

considerate, less invidious, not to "rave." Sitting there in the shade of the box with his companions, he had watched Miriam in attentive but inexpressive silence, glowing and vibrating inwardly, but, for these fine, deep reasons, not committing himself to the spoken rapture. Delicacy, it appeared to him, should rule the hour; and indeed he had never had a pleasure more delicate than this little period of still observation and repressed ecstasy. Miriam's art lost nothing by it, and Biddy's mild nearness only gained. This young lady was silent also — wonderingly, dauntedly, as if she too were conscious in relation to the actress of various other things beside her mastery of her art. To this mastery Biddy's attitude was a candid and liberal tribute: the poor girl sat quenched and pale, as if in the blinding light of a comparison by which it would be presumptuous even to be annihilated. Her subjection, however, was a gratified, a charmed subjection: there was a beneficence in such beauty — the beauty of the figure that moved before the footlights and spoke in music — even if it deprived one of hope. Peter didn't say to her, in vulgar elation and in reference to her whimsical profession of dislike at the studio, "Well, do you find this performer so disagreeable now?" and she was grateful to him for his forbearance, for the tacit kindness of which the idea seemed to be: "My poor child, I would prefer you if I could; but — judge for yourself — how can I?

Expect of me only the possible. Expect that, certainly, but only that." In the same degree Peter liked Biddy's sweet, hushed air of judging for herself, of recognizing his discretion and letting him off, while she was lost in the illusion, in the convincing picture, of the stage. Miss Tressilian did most of the criticism : she broke out cheerfully and sonorously from time to time, in reference to the actress : "Most striking, certainly," or, "She *is* clever, is n't she ?" It was a manner to which her companions found it impossible to respond. Miss Tressilian was disappointed in nothing but their enjoyment : they did n't seem to think the exhibition as amusing as she.

Walking away through the ordered void of Lady Agnes's quarter, with the four acts of the play glowing again before him in the smokeless London night, Sherringham found the liveliest thing in his impression the certitude that if he had never seen Miriam before, and she had had for him none of the advantages of association, he would still have recognized in her performance the most interesting thing that the theatre had ever offered him. He floated in a sense of the felicity of it, in the general encouragement of a thing perfectly done, in the almost aggressive bravery of still larger claims for an art which could so triumphantly, so exquisitely render life. "Render it ?" Peter said to himself. "Create it and reveal it, rather ; give us something new and

large and of the first order!" He had *seen* Miriam now; he had never seen her before; he had never seen her till he saw her in her conditions. Oh, her conditions — there were many things to be said about them; they were paltry enough as yet, inferior, inadequate, obstructive, as compared with the right, full, finished setting of such a talent; but the essence of them was now, irremovably, in Sherringham's eye, the vision of how the uplifted stage and the listening house transformed her. That idea of her having no character of her own came back to him with a force that made him laugh in the empty street: this was a disadvantage she was so exempt from that he appeared to himself not to have known her till to-night. Her character was simply to hold you by the particular spell; any other — the good-nature of home, the relation to her mother, her friends, her lovers, her debts, the practice of virtues or industries or vices — was not worth speaking of. These things were the fictions and shadows; the representation was the deep substance.

Sherringham had, as he went, an intense vision (he had often had it before) of the conditions which were still absent, the great and complete ones, those which would give the girl's talent a superior, glorious stage. More than ever he desired them, mentally invoked them, filled them out, in imagination, cheated himself with the idea that they were possible. He saw them in a

momentary illusion and confusion: a great academic, artistic theatre, subsidized and unburdened with money-getting, rich in its repertory, rich in the high quality and the wide array of its servants, and above all in the authority of an impossible administrator — a manager personally disinterested, not an actor with an eye to the main chance; pouring forth a continuity of tradition, striving for perfection, laying a splendid literature under contribution. He saw the heroine of a hundred "situations," variously dramatic and vividly real; he saw comedy and drama and passion and character and English life; he saw all humanity and history and poetry, and perpetually, in the midst of them, shining out in the high relief of some great moment, an image as fresh as an unveiled statue. He was not unconscious that he was taking all sorts of impossibilities and miracles for granted; but it really seemed to him for the time that the woman he had been watching three hours, the incarnation of the serious drama, would be a new and vivifying force. The world was just then so bright to him that Basil Dashwood struck him at first as an harmonious minister of that force.

It must be added that before Miriam arrived the breeze that filled Sherringham's sail began to sink a little. He passed out of the eminently "let" drawing-room, where twenty large photographs of the young actress bloomed in the desert; he went into the garden by a glass door

that stood open, and found Mr. Dashwood reclining on a bench and smoking cigarettes. This young man's conversation was a different music — it took him down, as he felt; showed him, very sensibly and intelligibly, it must be confessed, the actual theatre, the one they were all concerned with, the one they would have to make the miserable best of. It was fortunate for Sherringham that he kept his intoxication mainly to himself: the Englishman's habit of not being effusive still prevailed with him, even after his years of exposure to the foreign infection. Nothing could have been less exclamatory than the meeting of the two men, with its question or two, its remark or two, about Sherringham's arrival in London; its offhand "I noticed you last night. I was glad you turned up at last," on one side, and its attenuated "Oh, yes, it was the first time. I was very much interested," on the other. Basil Dashwood played a part in "Yolande," and Sherringham had had the satisfaction of taking the measure of his aptitude. He judged it to be of the small order, as indeed the part, which was neither that of the virtuous nor that of the villainous hero, restricted him to two or three inconspicuous effects and three or four changes of dress. He represented an ardent but respectful young lover whom the distracted heroine found time to pity a little and even to rail at; but it was impressed upon Sherringham that he scarcely represented young love. He looked very well,

but Peter had heard him already in a hundred contemporary pieces; he never got out of rehearsal. He uttered sentiments and breathed vows with a nice voice, with a shy, boyish tremor in it, but as if he were afraid of being chaffed for it afterwards; giving the spectator, in the stalls, the feeling of holding the prompt-book and listening to a recitation. He made one think of country-houses and lawn-tennis and private theatricals; than which there could not be, to Sherringham's sense, an association more disconnected with the actor's art.

Dashwood knew all about the new thing, the piece in rehearsal; he knew all about everything — receipts and salaries and expenses and newspaper articles, and what old Baskerville said and what Mrs. Ruffler thought: matters of superficial concern to Sherringham, who wondered, before Miriam appeared, whether she talked with her "walking-gentleman" about them by the hour, deep in them and finding them not vulgar and boring, but the natural air of her life and the essence of her profession. Of course she did — she naturally would; it was all in the day's work and he might feel sure she would n't turn up her nose at the shop. He had to remind himself that he did n't care if she did n't — that he would think worse of her if she should. She certainly had much confabulation with her competent playfellow, talking shop by the hour: Sherringham could see that from the familiar, customary way

Dashwood sat there with his cigarette, as if he were in possession and on his own ground. He divined a great intimacy between the two young artists, but asked himself at the same time what he, Peter Sherringham, had to say about it. He did n't pretend to control Miriam's intimacies, it was to be supposed; and if he had encouraged her to adopt a profession which abounded in opportunities for comradeship it was not for him to cry out because she had taken to it kindly. He had already descried a fund of utility in Mrs. Lovick's light brother; but it irritated him, all the same, after a while, to hear Basil Dashwood represent himself as almost indispensable. He was practical — there was no doubt of that; and this idea added to Sherringham's paradoxical sense that as regards the matters actually in question he himself had not this virtue. Dashwood had got Mrs. Rooth the house; it happened by a lucky chance that Laura Lumley, to whom it belonged (Sherringham would know Laura Lumley?) wanted to get rid, for a mere song, of the remainder of a lease. She was going to Australia with a troupe of her own. They just stepped into it; it was good air — the best sort of air to live in, to sleep in, in London, for people in their line. Sherringham wondered what Miriam's personal relations with this deucedly knowing gentleman might be, and was again able to assure himself that they might be anything in the world she liked, for any stake he, Peter, had in them.

Dashwood told him of all the smart people who had tried to take up the new star — the way the London world had already held out its hand; and perhaps it was Sherringham's irritation, the crushed sentiment I just mentioned, that gave a little heave in the exclamation, "Oh, that — that's all rubbish: the less of that the better!" At this Basil Dashwood stared; he evidently felt snubbed; he had expected his interlocutor to be pleased with the names of the eager ladies who had "called" — which proved to Sherringham that he took a low view of his art. The secretary of embassy explained (it is to be hoped not pedantically) that this art was serious work and that society was humbug and imbecility; also that of old the great comedians would n't have known such people. Garrick had essentially his own circle.

"No, I suppose they did n't call in the old narrow-minded time," said Basil Dashwood.

"Your profession did n't call. They had better company — that of the romantic, gallant characters they represented. They lived with *them*, and it was better all round." And Peter asked himself — for the young man looked as if that struck him as a dreary period — if *he* only, for Miriam, in her new life, or among the futilities of those who tried to find her accessible, expressed the artistic idea. This at least, Sherringham reflected, was a situation that could be improved.

He learned from Dashwood that the new play, the thing they were rehearsing, was an old play, a romantic drama of thirty years before, very frequently revived and threadbare with honorable service. Dashwood had a part in it, but there was an act in which he didn't appear, and that was the act they were doing that morning. "Yolande" had done all "Yolande" could do: Sherringham was mistaken if he supposed "Yolande" was such a tremendous hit. It had done very well, it had run three months, but they were by no means coining money with it. It wouldn't take them to the end of the season; they had seen, for a month past, that they would have to put on something else. Miss Rooth moreover wanted a new part; she was impatient to show what a range she was capable of. She had grand ideas; she thought herself very good-natured to repeat the same thing for three months. Basil Dashwood lighted another cigarette and described to his companion some of Miss Rooth's ideas. He gave Sherringham a great deal of information about her — about her character, her temper, her peculiarities, her little ways, her manner of producing some of her effects. He spoke with familiarity and confidence, as if he knew more about her than any one else — as if he had invented or discovered her, were in a sense her proprietor or guarantor. It was the talk of the shop, with a perceptible shrewdness in it and a touching young candor; the expan-

siveness of the commercial spirit when it relaxes and generalizes, is conscious it is safe with another member of the guild.

Sherringham could not help protesting against the lame old war-horse whom it was proposed to bring into action, who had been ridden to death and had saved a thousand desperate fields; and he exclaimed on the strange passion of the good British public for sitting again and again through expected situations, watching for speeches they had heard and surprises that struck the hour. Dashwood defended the taste of London, praised it as loyal, constant, faithful; to which Sherringham retorted with some vivacity that it was faithful to rubbish. He justified this sally by declaring that the play in rehearsal was rubbish, clumsy mediocrity which had outlived its convenience, and that the fault was the want of life in the critical sense of the public, which was ignobly docile, opening its mouth for its dose, like the pupils of Dotheboys Hall; not insisting on something different, on a fresh preparation. Dashwood asked him if he then wished Miss Rooth to go on playing forever a part she had repeated more than eighty nights on end: he thought the modern "run" was just what he had heard him denounce, in Paris, as the disease the theatre was dying of. This imputation Sherringham gainsaid; he wanted to know if she could n't change to something less stale than the piece in question. Dashwood opined that Miss Rooth

must have a strong part and that there happened to be one for her in the before-mentioned venerable novelty. She had to take what she could get; she was n't a girl to cry for the moon. This was a stop-gap — she would try other things later; she would have to look round her; you could n't have a new piece left at your door every day with the milk. On one point Sherringham's mind might be at rest: Miss Rooth was a woman who would do every blessed thing there was to do. Give her time and she would walk straight through the repertory. She was a woman who would do this — she was a woman who would do that: Basil Dashwood employed this phrase so often that Sherringham, nervous, got up and threw an unsmoked cigarette away. Of course she was a woman; there was no need of Dashwood's saying it a hundred times.

As for the repertory, the young man went on, the most beautiful girl in the world could give but what she had. He explained, after Sherringham sat down again, that the noise made by Miss Rooth was not exactly what this admirer appeared to suppose. Sherringham had seen the house the night before; would recognize that, though good, it was very far from great. She had done very well, very well indeed, but she had never gone above a point which Dashwood expressed in pounds sterling, to the edification of his companion, who vaguely thought the figure high. Sherringham remembered that he had

been unable to get a stall, but Dashwood insisted that the girl had not leaped into commanding fame: that was a thing that never happened in fact — it happened only in pretentious works of fiction. She had attracted notice, unusual notice for a woman whose name, the day before, had never been heard of: she was recognized as having, for a novice, extraordinary cleverness and confidence — in addition to her looks, of course, which were the thing that had really fetched the crowd. But she had n't been the talk of London; she had only been the talk of Gabriel Nash. He was n't London, more was the pity. He knew the æsthetic people — the worldly, semi-smart ones, not the frumpy, sickly lot who wore dirty drapery; and the æsthetic people had run after her. Basil Dashwood instructed Sherringham, sketchily, as to the different sects in the great religion of beauty, and was able to give him the particular "note" of the critical clique to which Miriam had begun so quickly to owe it that she had a vogue. The information made the secretary of embassy feel very ignorant of the world, very uninitiated and buried in his little professional hole. Dashwood warned him that it would be a long time before the general public would wake up to Miss Rooth, even after she had waked up to herself; she would have to do some really big thing first. *They* knew it was in her, the big thing — Sherringham and he, and even poor Nash — because they had seen her as

no one else had; but London never took any one on trust — it had to be cash down. It would take their young lady two or three years to pay out her cash and get her equivalent. But of course the equivalent would be simply a gold-mine. Within its limits, however, her success was already quite a fairy-tale: there was magic in the way she had concealed, from the first, her want of experience. She absolutely made you think she had a lot of it, more than any one else. Mr. Dashwood repeated several times that she was a cool hand — a deucedly cool hand; and that he watched her himself, saw ideas come to her, saw her try different dodges on different nights. She was always alive — she liked it herself. She gave *him* ideas, long as he had been on the stage. Naturally she had a great deal to learn — a tremendous lot to learn; a cosmopolite like Sherringham would understand that a girl of that age, who had never had a friend but her mother — her mother was greater fun than ever now — naturally *would* have. Sherringham winced at being called a "cosmopolite" by his young companion, just as he had winced a moment before at hearing himself lumped, in esoteric knowledge, with Dashwood and Gabriel Nash; but the former of these gentlemen took no account of his sensibility while he enumerated a few of the things that the young actress had to learn. Dashwood was a mixture of acuteness and innocent fatuity; and Sherringham had to recognize

that he had some of the elements of criticism in him when he said that the wonderful thing in the girl was that she learned so fast — learned something every night, learned from the same old piece, a lot more than any one else would have learned from twenty. "That 's what it is to be a genius," Sherringham remarked. "Genius is only the art of getting your experience fast, of stealing it, as it were; and in this sense Miss Rooth 's a regular brigand." Dashwood assented good-humoredly; then he added, "Oh, she 'll do!" It was exactly in these simple words, in speaking to her, that Sherringham had phrased the same truth; yet he did n't enjoy hearing them on his neighbor's lips: they had a profane, patronizing sound, suggestive of displeasing equalities.

The two men sat in silence for some minutes, watching a fat robin hop about on the little seedy lawn; at the end of which they heard a vehicle stop on the other side of the garden wall and the voices of people descending from it. "Here they come, the dear creatures," said Basil Dashwood, without moving; and from where they sat Sherringham saw the small door in the wall pushed open. The dear creatures were three in number, for a gentleman had added himself to Mrs. Rooth and her daughter. As soon as Miriam's eyes fell upon her Parisian friend she stopped short in a large, droll theatrical attitude, and, seizing her mother's arm, exclaimed, passion-

ately: "Look where he sits, the author of all my woes — cold, cynical, cruel!" She was evidently in the highest spirits; of which Mrs. Rooth partook as she cried, indulgently, giving her a slap, "Oh, get along, you gypsy!"

"She 's always up to something," Basil Dashwood commented, as Miriam, radiant and with a conscious stage tread, glided toward Sherringham as if she were coming to the footlights. He rose slowly from his seat, looking at her and struck with her beauty: he had been impatient to see her, yet in the act his impatience had had a disconcerting check.

Sherringham had had time to perceive that the man who had come in with her was Gabriel Nash, and this recognition brought a low sigh to his lips as he held out his hand to her — a sigh expressive of the sudden sense that his interest in her now could only be a gross community. Of course that did n't matter, since he had set it, at the most, such rigid limits; but none the less he stood vividly reminded that it would be public and notorious, that inferior people would be inveterately mixed up with it, that she had crossed the line and sold herself to the vulgar, making him, indeed, only one of an equalized multitude. The way Gabriel Nash turned up there just when he did n't want to see him made Peter feel that it was a complicated thing to have a friendship with an actress so clearly destined to be famous. He quite forgot that Nash had

known Miriam long before his own introduction to her and had been present at their first meeting, which he had in fact in a measure brought about. Had Sherringham not been so cut out to make trouble of this particular joy he might have found some adequate assurance that she distinguished him in the way in which, taking his hand in both of hers, she looked up at him and murmured, "Dear old master!" Then, as if this were not acknowledgment enough, she raised her head still higher, and whimsically, gratefully, charmingly, almost nobly, she kissed him on the lips, before the other men, before the good mother whose "Oh, you honest creature!" made everything regular.

XXXI.

If Peter Sherringham was ruffled by some of Miriam's circumstances there was comfort and consolation to be drawn from others, beside the essential fascination (there was no doubt about that now) of the young lady's own society. He spent the afternoon, they all spent the afternoon, and the occasion reminded him of a scene in "Wilhelm Meister." Mrs. Rooth had little resemblance to Mignon, but Miriam was remarkably like Philina. Luncheon was delayed two or three hours; but the long wait was a positive source of gayety, for they all smoked cigarettes in the garden and Miriam gave striking illustrations of the parts she was studying. Sherringham was in the state of a man whose toothache has suddenly stopped — he was exhilarated by the cessation of pain. The pain had been the effort to remain in Paris after Miriam came to London, and the balm of seeing her now was the measure of the previous soreness.

Gabriel Nash had, as usual, plenty to say, and he talked of Nick Dormer's picture so long that Sherringham wondered whether he did it on purpose to vex him. They went in and out of the house; they made excursions to see how lunch

was coming on; and Sherringham got half an hour alone, or virtually alone, with the object of his unsanctioned passion — drawing her publicly away from the others and making her sit with him in the most sequestered part of the little graveled grounds. There was summer enough in the trees to shut out the adjacent villas, and Basil Dashwood and Gabriel Nash lounged together at a convenient distance, while Nick's whimsical friend tried experiments upon the histrionic mind. Miriam confessed that, like all comedians, they ate at queer hours; she sent Dashwood in for biscuits and sherry — she proposed sending him round to the grocer's in the Circus Road for superior wine. Sherringham judged him to be the factotum of the little household: he knew where the biscuits were kept and the state of the grocer's account. When Peter congratulated the young actress on having so useful an associate she said genially, but as if the words disposed of him, "Oh, he 's awfully handy." To this she added, "You 're not, you know;" resting the kindest, most pitying eyes on him. The sensation they gave him was as sweet as if she had stroked his cheek, and her manner was responsive even to tenderness. She called him "Dear master" again, and sometimes "Cher maître," and appeared to express gratitude and reverence by every intonation.

"You 're doing the humble dependent now," he said: "you do it beautifully, as you do every-

thing." She replied that she did n't make it humble enough — she could n't; she was too proud, too insolent in her triumph. She liked that, the triumph, too much, and she did n't mind telling him that she was perfectly happy. Of course as yet the triumph was very limited; but success was success, whatever its quantity; the dish was a small one, but it had the right taste. Her imagination had already bounded beyond the first phase, unexpectedly brilliant as this had been: her position struck her as modest compared with a future that was now vivid to her. Sherringham had never seen her so soft and sympathetic; she had insisted, in Paris, that her personal character was that of the good girl (she used the term in a fine loose way), and it was impossible to be a better girl than she showed herself this pleasant afternoon. She was full of gossip and anecdote and drollery; she had exactly the air that he would have liked her to have — that of thinking of no end of things to tell him. It was as if she had just returned from a long journey, had had strange adventures and made wonderful discoveries. She began to speak of this and that, and broke off to speak of something else; she talked of the theatre, of the newspapers and then of London, of the people she had met and the extraordinary things they said to her, of the parts she was going to take up, of lots of new ideas that had come to her about the art of comedy. See wanted to do comedy now — to do

the comedy of London life. She was delighted to find that seeing more of the world suggested things to her; they came straight from the fact, from nature, if you could call it nature: so that she was convinced more than ever that the artist ought to *live*, to get on with his business, gather ideas, lights from experience — ought to welcome any experience that would give him lights. But work, of course, *was* experience, and everything in one's life that was good was work. That was the jolly thing in the actor's trade — it made up for other elements that were odious: if you only kept your eyes open nothing could happen to you that would n't be food for observation and grist to your mill, showing you how people looked and moved and spoke, cried and grimaced, or writhed and dissimulated, in given situations. She saw all round her things she wanted to "do" — London was full of them, if you had eyes to see. Miriam demanded imperiously why people did n't take them up, put them into plays and parts, give one a chance with them; she expressed her sharp impatience of the general literary stupidity. She had never been chary of this particular displeasure, and there were moments (it was an old story and a subject of frank raillery to Sherringham) when to hear her you might have thought there was no cleverness anywhere but in her disdainful mind. She wanted tremendous things done, that she might use them, but she did n't pretend to say exactly what they were to be, nor, even ap-

proximately, how they were to be handled: her ground was rather that if *she* only had a pen — it was exasperating to have to explain! She mainly contented herself with declaring that nothing had really been touched: she felt that more and more as she saw more of people's goings-on.

Sherringham went to her theatre again that evening, and he made no scruple of going every night for a week. Rather, perhaps I should say, he made a scruple; but it was a part of the pleasure of his life during these arbitrary days to overcome it. The only way to prove to himself that he could overcome it was to go; and he was satisfied, after he had been seven times, not only with the spectacle on the stage but with his own powers of demonstration. There was no satiety, however, with the spectacle on the stage, inasmuch as that only produced a further curiosity. Miriam's performance was a living thing, with a power to change, to grow, to develop, to beget new forms of the same life. Peter Sherringham contributed to it, in his amateurish way, and watched with solicitude the fate of his contributions. He talked it over in Balaklava Place, suggested modifications, variations worth trying. Miriam professed herself thankful for any refreshment that could be administered to her interest in "Yolande," and, with an effectiveness that showed large resource, touched up her part and drew several new airs from it. Sherringham's suggestions bore upon her way of uttering cer

tain speeches, the intonations that would have more beauty or make the words mean more. Miriam had her ideas, or rather she had her instincts, which she defended and illustrated, with a vividness superior to argument, by a happy pictorial phrase or a snatch of mimicry; but she was always for trying; she liked experiments and caught at them, and she was especially thankful when some one gave her a showy reason, a plausible formula, in a case where she only stood upon an intuition. She pretended to despise reasons and to like and dislike at her sovereign pleasure; but she always honored the exotic gift, so that Sherringham was amused with the liberal way she produced it, as if she had been a naked islander rejoicing in a present of crimson cloth.

Day after day he spent most of his time in her society, and Miss Laura Lumley's recent habitation became the place in London to which his thoughts were most attached. He was highly conscious that he was not now carrying out that principle of abstention which he had brought to such maturity before leaving Paris; but he contented himself with a much cruder justification of this inconsequence than he would have thought adequate in advance. It consisted simply in the idea that to be identified with the first public steps of a young genius was a delightful experience. What was the harm of it, if the genius were real? Sherringham's main security was now that his relations with Miriam had been

frankly placed under the protection of the idea of legitimate extravagance. In this department they made a very creditable figure, and required much less watching and pruning than when it was his effort to fit them into a worldly plan. Sherringham had a sense of real wisdom when he said to himself that it surely should be enough that this momentary intellectual participation in the girl's dawning fame was a charming thing. Charming things, in a busy man's life, were not frequent enough to be kicked out of the way. Balaklava Place, looked at in this philosophic way, became almost idyllic: it gave Peter the pleasantest impression he had ever had of London.

The season happened to be remarkably fine; the temperature was high, but not so high as to keep people from the theatre. Miriam's "business" visibly increased, so that the question of putting on the second play underwent some reconsideration. The girl insisted, showing in her insistence a temper of which Sherringham had already caught some splendid gleams. It was very evident that through her career it would be her expectation to carry things with a high hand. Her managers and agents would not find her an easy victim or a calculable force; but the public would adore her, surround her with the popularity that attaches to a humorous, good-natured princess, and her comrades would have a kindness for her, because she would n't be selfish.

They too would form, in a manner, a portion of her affectionate public. This was the way Sherringham read the signs, liking her whimsical tolerance of some of her vulgar playfellows almost well enough to forgive their presence in Balaklava Place, where they were a sore trial to her mother, who wanted her to multiply her points of contact only with the higher orders. There were hours when Sherringham thought he foresaw that her principal relation to the proper world would be to have, within two or three years, a grand battle with it, making it take her, if she let it have her at all, absolutely on her own terms: a picture which led our young man to ask himself, with a helplessness that was not exempt, as he perfectly knew, from absurdity, what part *he* should find himself playing in such a contest and if it would be reserved to him to be the more ridiculous as a peacemaker or as a heavy auxiliary.

"She might know any one she would, and the only person she appears to take any pleasure in is that dreadful Miss Rover," Mrs. Rooth whimpered, more than once, to Sherringham, who recognized in the young lady so designated the principal complication of Balaklava Place.

Miss Rover was a little actress who played at Miriam's theatre, combining with an unusual aptitude for delicate comedy a less exceptional absence of rigor in private life. She was pretty and quick and clever, and had a fineness that

Miriam professed herself already in a position to estimate as rare. She had no control of her inclinations; yet sometimes they were wholly laudable, like the devotion she had formed for her beautiful colleague, whom she admired not only as an ornament of the profession, but as a being of a more fortunate essence. She had had an idea that real ladies were "nasty;" but Miriam was not nasty, and who could gainsay that Miriam was a real lady? The girl justified herself to Sherringham, who had found no fault with her; she knew how much her mother feared that the proper world would n't come in if they knew that the improper, in the person of pretty Miss Rover, was on the ground. What did she care who came and who did n't, and what was to be gained by receiving half the snobs in London? People would have to take her exactly as they found her — that they would have to learn; and they would be much mistaken if they thought her capable of becoming a snob too, for the sake of their sweet company. She did n't pretend to be anything but what she meant to be, the best general actress of her time; and what had that to do with her seeing or not seeing a poor ignorant girl who had lov— Well, she need n't say what Fanny had. She had met her in the way of business — she did n't say she would have run after her. She had liked her because she was n't a stick, and when Fanny Rover had asked her, quite wistfully, if she might n't come and see her, she had n't bristled with scandalized

virtue. Miss Rover was not a bit more stupid or more ill-natured than any one else: it would be time enough to shut the door when she should become so.

Sherringham commended, even to extravagance, the liberality of such comradeship; said that of course a woman did n't go into that profession to see how little she could swallow. She was right to live with the others so long as they were at all possible, and it was for her, and only for her, to judge how long that might be. This was rather heroic on Peter's part, for his assumed detachment from the girl's personal life still left him a margin for some forms of uneasiness. It would have made, in his spirit, a great difference for the worse that the woman he loved, and for whom he wished no baser lover than himself, should have embraced the prospect of consorting only with the cheaper kind. It was all very well, but Fanny Rover was simply a *cabotine*, and that sort of association was an odd training for a young woman who was to have been good enough (he could n't forget that — he kept remembering it, as if it might still have a future use) to be his wife. Certainly he ought to have thought of such things before he permitted himself to become so interested in a theatrical nature. His heroism did him service, however, for the hour: it helped him by the end of the week to feel tremendously broken in to Miriam's little circle. What helped him most, indeed, was to reflect

that she would get tired of a good many of its members herself, in time; for it was not that they were shocking (very few of them shone with that intense light), but that they could be trusted in the long run to bore you.

There was a lovely Sunday, in particular, that he spent almost wholly in Balaklava Place — he arrived so early — when, in the afternoon, all sorts of odd people dropped in. Miriam held a reception in the little garden and insisted on almost all the company's staying to supper. Her mother shed tears to Sherringham, in the desecrated house, because they had accepted, Miriam and she, an invitation — and in Cromwell Road too — for the evening. Miriam decreed that they should n't go: they would have much better fun with their good friends at home. She sent off a message — it was a terrible distance — by a cabman, and Sherringham had the privilege of paying the messenger. Basil Dashwood, in another vehicle, proceeded to an hotel that he knew, a mile away, for supplementary provisions, and came back with a cold ham and a dozen of champagne. It was all very Bohemian and journalistic and picturesque, very supposedly droll and enviable to outsiders; and Miriam told anecdotes and gave imitations of the people she would have met if she had gone out: so no one had a sense of loss — the two occasions were fantastically united. Mrs. Rooth drank champagne, for consolation; though the consolation

was imperfect when she remembered that she might have drunk it (not quite so much, indeed) in Cromwell Road.

Taken in connection with the evening before, the day formed, for Sherringham, the most complete exhibition he had had of Miriam Rooth. He had been at the theatre, to which the Saturday night happened to have brought the fullest house she had yet played to, and he came early to Balaklava Place, to tell her once again (he had told her half a dozen times the evening before) that, with the excitement of her biggest audience, she had surpassed herself, acted with remarkable intensity. It pleased her to hear it, and the spirit with which she interpreted the signs of the future, and, during an hour he spent alone with her, Mrs. Rooth being up-stairs and Basil Dashwood not arrived, treated him to specimens of fictive emotion of various kinds, was beyond any natural abundance that he had yet seen in a woman. The impression could scarcely have been other if she had been playing wild snatches to him at the piano: the bright, up-darting flame of her talk rose and fell like an improvisation on the keys. Later, all the rest of the day, he was fascinated by the good grace with which she fraternized with her visitors, finding the right words for each, the solvent of incongruities, the right ideas to keep vanity quiet and make humility gay. It was a wonderful expenditure of generous, nervous life. But what Sherringham read in it above

all was the sense of success in youth, with the future large, and the action of that force upon all the faculties. Miriam's limited past had yet pinched her enough to make emancipation sweet, and the emancipation had come at last in an hour. She had stepped into her magic shoes, divined and appropriated everything they could give her, become, in a day, a really original contemporary. Sherringham was of course not less conscious of that than Nick Dormer had been when, in the cold light of his studio, he saw how she had altered.

But the great thing, to his mind and, these first days, the irresistible seduction of the theatre, was that she was a rare incarnation of beauty. Beauty was the principle of everything she did and of the way, unerringly, she did it — an exquisite harmony of line and motion and attitude and tone, what was most general and most characteristic in her performance. Accidents and instincts played together to this end and constituted something which was independent of her talent or of her merit, in a given case, and which in its influence, to Sherringham's imagination, was far superior to any merit and to any talent. It was a supreme infallible felicity, a source of importance, a stamp of absolute value. To see it in operation, to sit within its radius and feel it shift and revolve and change and never fail, was a corrective to the depression, the humiliation, the bewilderment of life. It trans-

ported Sherringham from the vulgar hour and the ugly fact; drew him to something which had no reason but its sweetness, no name nor place save as the pure, the distant, the antique. It was what most made him say to himself, "Oh, hang it, what does it matter?" when he reflected that an *homme sérieux* (as they said in Paris) rather gave himself away (as they said in America) by going every night to the same theatre, for all the world to stare. It was what kept him from doing anything but hover round Miriam — kept him from paying any other visits, from attending to any business, from going back to Calcutta Gardens. It was a spell which he shrank intensely from breaking, and the cause of a hundred postponements, confusions and incoherences. It made of the crooked little stucco villa in St. John's Wood a place in the upper air, commanding the prospect; a nest of winged liberties and ironies, hanging far aloft above the huddled town. One should live at altitudes when one could — they braced and simplified; and for a happy interval Sherringham never touched the earth.

It was not that there were no influences tending at moments to drag him down — an abasement from which he escaped only because he was up so high. We have seen that Basil Dashwood could affect him at times like a piece of wood tied to his ankle, through the circumstance that he made Miriam's famous conditions — those of the public exhibition of her genius — seem small

and prosaic; so that Sherringham had to remind himself that perhaps this smallness was involved in their being at all. She carried his imagination off into infinite spaces, whereas she carried Dashwood's only into the box-office and the revival of plays that were barbarously bad. The worst was that it was open to him to believe that a sharp young man who was in the business might know better than he. Another possessor of superior knowledge (he talked, that is, as if he knew better than any one) was Gabriel Nash, who appeared to have abundant leisure to haunt Balaklava Place, or in other words appeared to enjoy the same command of his time as Peter Sherringham. Our young diplomatist regarded him with mingled feelings, for he had not forgotten the contentious character of their first meeting or the degree to which he had been moved to urge upon Nick Dormer's consideration that his talkative friend was probably an ass. This personage turned up now as an admirer of the charming creature he had scoffed at, and there was something exasperating in the quietude of his inconsistency, of which he had not the least embarrassing consciousness. Indeed he had such fantastic and desultory ways of looking at any question that it was difficult, in vulgar parlance, to have him; his sympathies hummed about like bees in a garden, with no visible plan, no economy in their flight. He thought meanly of the modern theatre and yet he had discovered a fund of satis-

faction in the most promising of its exponents; so that Sherringham more than once said to him that he should really, to keep his opinions at all in hand, attach more value to the stage or less to the interesting actress. Miriam made infinitely merry at his expense and treated him as the most abject of her slaves: all of which was worth seeing as an exhibition, on Nash's part, of the imperturbable. When Sherringham mentally pronounced him impudent he felt guilty of an injustice — Nash had so little the air of a man with something to gain. Nevertheless he felt a certain itching in his boot-toe when his fellow-visitor exclaimed, explicatively (in general to Miriam herself), in answer to a charge of tergiversation: "Oh, it's all right; it's the voice, you know — the enchanting voice!" He meant by this, as indeed he more fully set forth, that he came to the theatre, or to the villa in St. John's Wood, simply to treat his ear to the sound (the richest then to be heard on earth, as he maintained) issuing from Miriam's lips. Its richness was quite independent of the words she might pronounce or the poor fable they might subserve, and if the pleasure of hearing her in public was the greater by reason of the larger volume of her utterance, it was still highly agreeable to see her at home, for it was there that the artistic nature that he freely conceded to her came out most. He spoke as if she had been formed by the bounty of nature to be his particular recreation,

and as if, being an expert in innocent joys, he took his pleasure wherever he found it.

He was perpetually in the field, sociable, amiable, communicative, inveterately contradicted but never confounded, ready to talk to any one about anything and making disagreement (of which he left the responsibility wholly to others) a basis of intimacy. Every one knew what he thought of the theatrical profession, and yet it could not be said that he did not regard its members as the exponents of comedy, inasmuch as he often elicited their foibles in a way that made even Sherringham laugh, notwithstanding his attitude of reserve where Nash was concerned. At any rate, though he had committed himself on the subject of the general fallacy of their attempt, he put up with their company, for the sake of Miriam's accents, with a practical philosophy that was all his own. Miriam pretended that he was her supreme, her incorrigible adorer, masquerading as a critic to save his vanity and tolerated for his secret constancy in spite of being a bore. To Sherringham he was not a bore, and the secretary of embassy felt a certain displeasure at not being able to regard him as one. He had seen too many strange countries and curious things, observed and explored too much, to be void of illustration. Peter had a suspicion that if he himself was in the *grandes espaces* Gabriel Nash probably had a still wider range. If among Miriam's associates Basil Dashwood dragged him

down, Gabriel challenged him rather to higher and more fantastic flights. If he saw the girl in larger relations than the young actor, who mainly saw her in ill-written parts, Nash went a step further and regarded her, irresponsibly and sublimely, as a priestess of harmony, with whom the vulgar ideas of success and failure had nothing to do. He laughed at her "parts," holding that without them she would be great. Sherringham envied him his power to content himself with the pleasures he could get: he had a shrewd impression that contentment was not destined to be the sweetener of his own repast.

Above all Nash held his attention by a constant element of unstudied reference to Nick Dormer, who, as we know, had suddenly become much more interesting to his cousin. Sherringham found food for observation, and in some measure for perplexity, in the relations of all these clever people with each other. He knew why his sister, who had a personal impatience of unapplied ideas, had not been agreeably affected by Mr. Nash and had not viewed with complacency a predilection for him in the man she was to marry. This was a side by which he had no desire to resemble Julia Dallow, for he needed no teaching to divine that Gabriel had not set her intelligence in motion. He, Peter, would have been sorry to have to confess that he could not understand him. He understood, furthermore, that Miriam, in Nick's studio, might

very well have appeared to Julia a formidable power. She was younger, but she had quite as much her own form, and she was beautiful enough to have made Nick compare her with Mrs. Dallow even if he had been in love with that lady — a pretension as to which Peter had private ideas.

Sherringham, for many days, saw nothing of the member for Harsh, though it might have been said that, by implication, he participated in the life of Balaklava Place. Had Nick given Julia tangible grounds, and was his unexpectedly fine rendering of Miriam an act of virtual infidelity? In that case, in what degree was Miriam to be regarded as an accomplice in his defection, and what was the real nature of this young lady's esteem for her new and (as he might be called) distinguished ally? These questions would have given Peter still more to think about if he had not flattered himself that he had made up his mind that they concerned Nick and Miriam infinitely more than they concerned him. Miriam was personally before him, so that he had no need to consult, for his pleasure, his fresh recollection of the portrait. But he thought of this striking production each time he thought of his enterprising kinsman. And that happened often, for in his hearing Miriam often discussed the happy artist and his possibilities with Gabriel Nash, and Gabriel broke out about them to Miriam. The girl's tone on the subject was frank

and simple: she only said, with an iteration that was slightly irritating, that Mr. Dormer had been tremendously kind to her. She never mentioned Julia's irruption to Julia's brother; she only referred to the portrait, with inscrutable amenity, as a direct consequence of Peter's fortunate suggestion that first day at Madame Carré's. Gabriel Nash, however, showed such a disposition to expatiate, sociably and luminously, on the peculiarly interesting character of what he called Dormer's predicament and on the fine suspense which it was fitted to kindle in the breast of discerning friends, that Peter wondered, as I have already hinted, if this insistence were not a subtle perversity, a devilish little invention to torment a man whose jealousy was presumable. Yet on the whole Nash struck him as but scantily devilish and as still less occupied with the prefigurement of *his* emotions. Indeed, he threw a glamour of romance over Nick; tossed off such illuminating yet mystifying references to him that Sherringham found himself capable of a magnanimous curiosity, a desire to follow out the chain of events. He learned from Gabriel that Nick was still away, and he felt as if he could almost submit to instruction, to initiation. The rare charm of these unregulated days was troubled — it ceased to be idyllic — when, late on the evening of the second Sunday, he walked away with Gabriel, southward, from St. John's Wood. For then something came out.

XXXII.

It mattered not so much what the doctors thought (and Sir Matthew Hope, the greatest of them all, had been down twice in one week) as that Mr. Chayter, the omniscient butler, declared with all the authority of his position and his experience that Mr. Carteret was very bad indeed. Nick Dormer had a long talk with him (it lasted six minutes) the day he hurried to Beauclere in response to a telegram. It was Mr. Chayter who had taken upon himself to telegraph, in spite of the presence in the house of Mr. Carteret's nearest relation and only surviving sister, Mrs. Lendon. This lady, a large, mild, healthy woman, with a heavy tread, who liked early breakfasts, uncomfortable chairs and the advertisement-sheet of the "Times," had arrived the week before and was awaiting the turn of events. She was a widow and lived in Cornwall, in a house nine miles from a station, which had, to make up for this inconvenience, as she had once told Nick, a delightful old herbaceous garden. She was extremely fond of an herbaceous garden; her principal interest was in that direction. Nick had often seen her — she came to Beauclere once or twice a year. Her sojourn there made no great

difference; she was only an "Urania, dear," for Mr. Carteret to look across the table at when, on the close of dinner, it was time for her to retire. She went out of the room always as if it were after some one else; and on the gentlemen "joining" her later (the junction was not very close) she received them with an air of gratified surprise.

Chayter honored Nick Dormer with a regard which approached, without improperly competing with it, the affection his master had placed on the same young head, and Chayter knew a good many things. Among them he knew his place; but it was wonderful how little that knowledge had rendered him inaccessible to other kinds. He took upon himself to send for Nick without speaking to Mrs. Lendon, whose influence was now a good deal like that of a large occasional piece of furniture, which had been introduced in case it should be required. She was one of the solid conveniences that a comfortable house would have; but you could n't talk with a mahogany sofa or a folding screen. Chayter knew how much she had "had" from her brother, and how much her two daughters had each received on marriage; and he was of the opinion that it was quite enough, especially considering the society in which they (you could scarcely call it) moved. He knew, beyond this, that they would all have more, and that was why he hesitated little about communicating with Nick. If Mrs. Lendon

should be ruffled at the intrusion of a young man who neither was the child of a cousin nor had been formally adopted, Chayter was parliamentary enough to see that the forms of debate were observed. He had indeed a slightly compassionate sense that Mrs. Lendon was not easily ruffled. She was always down an extraordinary time before breakfast (Chayter refused to take it as in the least admonitory), but she usually went straight into the garden (as if to see that none of the plants had been stolen in the night), and had in the end to be looked for by the footman in some out-of-the-way spot behind the shrubbery, where, plumped upon the ground, she was doing something "rum" to a flower.

Mr. Carteret himself had expressed no wishes. He slept most of the time (his failure at the last had been sudden, but he was rheumatic and seventy-seven), and the situation was in Chayter's hands. Sir Matthew Hope had opined, even on his second visit, that he would rally and go on, in rudimentary comfort, some time longer; but Chayter took a different and a still more intimate view. Nick was embarrassed: he scarcely knew what he was there for from the moment he could give his good old friend no conscious satisfaction. The doctors, the nurses, the servants, Mrs. Lendon, and above all the settled equilibrium of the square, thick house, where an immutable order appeared to slant through the polished windows and tinkle in the quieter bells, all represented

best the kind of supreme solace to which the master was most accessible.

For the first day it was judged better that Nick should not be introduced into the darkened chamber. This was the decision of the two decorous nurses, of whom the visitor had had a glimpse, and who, with their black uniforms and fresh faces of business, suggested a combination of the barmaid and the nun. He was depressed, yet restless, felt himself in a false position and thought it lucky Mrs. Lendon had powers of placid acceptance. They were old acquaintances: she treated him with a certain ceremony, but it was not the rigor of mistrust. It was much more an expression of remote Cornish respect for young abilities and distinguished connections, inasmuch as she asked him a great deal about Lady Agnes and about Lady Flora and Lady Elizabeth. He knew she was kind and ungrudging, and his principal chagrin was the sense of meagre information and of responding poorly in regard to his uninteresting aunts. He sat in the garden with newspapers and looked at the lowered blinds in Mr. Carteret's windows; he wandered around the abbey with cigarettes, and lightened his tread and felt grave, wishing that everything were over. He would have liked much to see Mr. Carteret again, but he had no desire that Mr. Carteret should see him. In the evening he dined with Mrs. Lendon, and she talked to him, at his request, and as much as she could, about her bro-

ther's early years, his beginnings of life. She was so much younger that they appeared to have been rather a tradition of her own youth; but her talk made Nick feel how tremendously different Mr. Carteret had been at that period from what he, Nick, was to-day. He had published, at the age of thirty, a little volume (it was thought wonderfully clever) called "The Incidence of Rates;" but Nick had not yet collected the material for any such treatise. After dinner Mrs. Lendon, who was in full dress, retired to the drawing-room, where, at the end of ten minutes, she was followed by Nick, who had remained behind only because he thought Chayter would expect it. Mrs. Lendon almost shook hands with him again, and then Chayter brought in coffee. Almost in no time afterwards he brought in tea, and the occupants of the drawing-room sat for a slow half-hour, during which the lady looked round at the apartment with a sigh and said: "Don't you think poor Charles had exquisite taste?"

Fortunately, at this moment, the "local man" was ushered in. He had been up-stairs, and he entered, smiling, with the remark, "It's quite wonderful — it's quite wonderful." What was wonderful was a marked improvement in the breathing, a distinct indication of revival. The doctor had some tea, and he chatted for a quarter of an hour in a way that showed what a "good" manner and how large an experience a local man could have. When he went away Nick walked

out with him. The doctor's house was near by and he had come on foot. He left Nick with the assurance that in all probability Mr. Carteret, who was certainly picking up, would be able to see him on the morrow. Our young man turned his steps again to the abbey and took a stroll about it in the starlight. It never looked so huge as when it reared itself into the night, and Nick had never felt more fond of it than on this occasion, more comforted and confirmed by its beauty. When he came back he was readmitted by Chayter, who surveyed him in respectful deprecation of the frivolity which had led him to attempt to help himself through such an evening in such a way.

Nick went to bed early and slept badly, which was unusual with him; but it was a pleasure to him to be told almost as soon as he came out of his room that Mr. Carteret had asked for him. He went in to see him, and was struck with the change in his appearance. He had, however, spent a day with him just after the New Year, and another at the beginning of March, so that he had perceived the first symptoms of mortal alteration. A week after Julia Dallow's departure for the Continent Nick had devoted several hours to Beauclere and to the intention of telling his old friend how the happy event had been brought to naught — the advantage that he had been so good as to desire for him and to make the condition of a splendid gift. Before this, for

a few days, Nick had been keeping back, to announce it personally, the good news that Julia had at last set their situation in order: he wanted to enjoy the old man's pleasure — so sore a trial had her arbitrary behavior been for a year. Mrs. Dallow had offered Mr. Carteret a conciliatory visit before Christmas — had come down from London one day to lunch with him, but only with the effect of making him subsequently exhibit to poor Nick, as the victim of her whimsical hardness, a great deal of earnest commiseration in a jocose form. Upon his honor, as he said, she was as clever and "specious" a woman (this was the odd expression he used) as he had ever seen in his life. The merit of her behavior on this occasion, as Nick knew, was that she had not been specious at her lover's expense: she had breathed no doubt of his public purpose and had had the feminine courage to say that in truth she was older than he, so that it was only fair to give his affections time to mature. But when Nick saw their sympathizing host after the rupture that I lately narrated, he found him in no state to encounter a disappointment: he was seriously ailing, it was the beginning of worse things and no time for trying on a sensation. After this excursion Nick went back to town saddened by Mr. Carteret's now unmistakably settled decline, but rather relieved that he had not been forced to make his confession. It had even occurred to him that the need for making it

might not come up if the ebb of his old friend's strength should continue unchecked. He might pass away in the persuasion that everything would happen as he wished it, though indeed without enriching Nick on his wedding-day to the tune that he had promised. Very likely he had made legal arrangements in virtue of which his bounty would take effect in the right conditions and in them alone. At present Nick had a larger confession to treat him to — the last three days had made the difference; but, oddly enough, though his responsibility had increased his reluctance to speak had vanished: he was positively eager to clear up a situation over which it was not consistent with his honor to leave a shade.

The doctor had been right when he came in after dinner; it was clear in the morning that they had not seen the last of Mr. Carteret's power of picking up. Chayter, who had been in to see him, refused austerely to change his opinion with every change in his master's temperature; but the nurses took the cheering view that it would do their patient good for Mr. Dormer to sit with him a little. One of them remained in the room, in the deep window-seat, and Nick spent twenty minutes by the bedside. It was not a case for much conversation, but Mr. Carteret seemed to like to look at him. There was life in his kind old eyes, which would express itself yet in some further wise provision. He laid

his liberal hand on Nick's with a confidence which showed it was not yet disabled. He said very little, and the nurse had recommended that the visitor himself should not overflow in speech; but from time to time he murmured, with a faint smile: "To-night's division, you know — you must n't miss it." There was to be no division that night, as it happened, but even Mr. Carteret's aberrations were parliamentary. Before Nick left him he had been able to assure him that he was rapidly getting better, that such valuable hours must not be wasted. "Come back on Friday, if they come to the second reading." These were the words with which Nick was dismissed, and at noon the doctor said the invalid was doing very well, but that Nick had better leave him alone for that day. Our young man accordingly determined to go up to town for the night, and even, if he should receive no summons, for the next day. He arranged with Chayter that he should be telegraphed to if Mr. Carteret were either better or worse.

"Oh, he can't very well be worse, sir," Chayter replied, inexorably; but he relaxed so far as to remark that of course it would n't do for Nick to neglect the House.

"Oh, the House!" Nick sighed, ambiguously, avoiding the butler's eye. It would be easy enough to tell Mr. Carteret, but nothing would have sustained him in the effort to make a clean breast to Chayter.

He might be ambiguous about the House, but he had the sense of things to be done awaiting him in London. He telegraphed to his servant and spent that night in Rosedale Road. The things to be done were apparently to be done in his studio: his servant met him there with a large bundle of letters. He failed that evening to stray within two miles of Westminster, and the legislature of his country reassembled without his support. The next morning he received a telegram from Chayter, to whom he had given Rosedale Road as an address. This missive simply informed him that Mr. Carteret wished to see him, and it seemed to imply that he was better, though Chayter would n't say so. Nick again took his place in the train to Beauclere. He had been there very often, but it was present to him that now, after a little, he should go only once more, for a particular dismal occasion. All that was over — everything that belonged to it was over. He learned on his arrival — he saw Mrs. Lendon immediately — that his old friend had continued to pick up. He had expressed a strong and a perfectly rational desire to talk with Nick, and the doctor had said that if it was about anything important it was much better not to oppose him. "He says it 's about something very important," Mrs. Lendon remarked, resting shy eyes on him while she added that *she* was looking after her brother for the hour. She had sent those wonderful young ladies out to see the

abbey. Nick paused with her outside of Mr. Carteret's door. He wanted to say something comfortable to her in return for her homely charity — give her a hint, which she was far from looking for, that practically he had now no interest in her brother's estate. This was impossible, of course. Her absence of irony gave him no pretext, and such an illusion would be an insult to her simple discretion. She was either not thinking of his interest at all, or she was thinking of it with the tolerance of a mind trained to a hundred decent submissions. Nick looked for an instant into her mild, uninvestigating eyes, and it came over him, supremely, that the goodness of these people was singularly pure: they were a part of what was cleanest and sanest and dullest in humanity. There had been just a little mocking inflection in Mrs. Lendon's pleasant voice; but it was dedicated to the young ladies in the black uniforms (she could perhaps be satirical about *them*), and not to the theory of the "importance" of Nick's interview with her brother. Nick's arrested desire to let her know he was not dangerous translated itself into a vague friendliness and into the abrupt, rather bewildering words, "I can't tell you half the good I think of you." As he passed into Mr. Carteret's room it occurred to him that she would perhaps interpret this speech as an acknowledgment of obligation — of her good-nature in not keeping him away from the rich old man.

XXXIII.

MR. CARTERET was propped up on pillows, and in this attitude, beneath the high, spare canopy of his bed, presented himself to Nick's picture-seeking vision as a figure in a clever composition or a novel. He had gathered strength, though this strength was not much in his voice; it was mainly in his brighter eye and his air of being pleased with himself. He put out his hand and said, "I dare say you know why I sent for you;" upon which Nick sank into the seat he had occupied the day before, replying that he had been delighted to come, whatever the reason. Mr. Carteret said nothing more about the division or the second reading; he only murmured that they were keeping the newspapers for him. "I 'm rather behind — I 'm rather behind," he went on; "but two or three quiet mornings will make it all right. You can go back to-night, you know — you can easily go back." This was the only thing not quite straight that Nick saw in him, — his making light of his young friend's flying to and fro. Nick sat looking at him with a sense that was half compunction and half the idea of the rare beauty of his face, to which, strangely, the waste of illness now seemed to have restored

some of its youth. Mr. Carteret was evidently conscious that this morning he should not be able to go on long, so that he must be practical and concise. "I dare say you know — you have only to remember," he continued..

"You know what a pleasure it is to me to see you — there can be no better reason than that."

"Has n't the year come round — the year of that foolish arrangement?"

Nick thought a little, asking himself if it were really necessary to disturb his companion's earnest faith. Then the consciousness of the falsity of his own position surged over him again, and he replied: "Do you mean the period for which Mrs. Dallow insisted on keeping me dangling? Oh, that 's over."

"And are you married — has it come off?" the old man asked, eagerly. "How long have I been ill?"

"We are uncomfortable, unreasonable people, not deserving of your interest. We are not married," Nick said.

"Then I have n't been ill so long," Mr. Carteret sighed, with vague relief.

"Not very long — but things *are* different," Nick continued.

The old man's eyes rested on his, and Nick noted how much larger they appeared. "You mean the arrangements are made — the day is at hand?"

"There are no arrangements," Nick smiled: "but why should it trouble you?"

"What then will you do — without arrangements?" Mr. Carteret's inquiry was plaintive and childlike.

"We shall do nothing — there is nothing to be done. We are not to be married — it 's all off," said Nick. Then he added: "Mrs. Dallow has gone abroad."

The old man, motionless among his pillows, gave a long groan. "Ah, I don't like that."

"No more do I, sir."

"What 's the matter? It was so good — so good."

"It was n't good enough for her," Nick Dormer declared.

"For her? Is she so great as that? She told me she had the greatest regard for you. You 're good enough for the best, my dear boy," Mr. Carteret went on.

"You don't know me; I *am* disappointing. Mrs. Dallow had, I believe, a great regard for me, but I have forfeited her regard."

The old man stared, at this cynical announcement: he searched his companion's face for some attenuation of the words. But Nick apparently struck him as unashamed; and a faint color coming into his withered cheek indicated his mystification and alarm. "Have you been unfaithful to her?" he demanded, considerately.

"She thinks so — it comes to the same thing.

As I told you a year ago, she does n't believe in me."

"You ought to have made her — you ought to have made her," said Mr. Carteret. Nick was about to utter some rejoinder when he continued: "Do you remember what I told you I would give you, if you did? Do you remember what I told you I would give you on your wedding-day?"

"You expressed the most generous intentions; and I remember them as much as a man may do who has no wish to remind you of them."

"The money is there — I have put it aside."

"I have n't earned it — I have n't earned a penny of it. Give it to those who deserve it more."

"I don't understand — I don't understand," Mr. Carteret murmured, with the tears of weakness coming into his eyes. His face flushed and he added: "I 'm not good for much discussion; I 'm very much disappointed."

"I think I may say it 's not my fault — I have done what I can," returned Nick.

"But when people are in love they do more than that."

"Oh, it 's all over!" Nick exclaimed; not caring much now, for the moment, how disconcerted his companion might be, so long as he disabused him of the idea that they were partners to a bargain. "We 've tormented each other and we 've tormented you; and that is all that has come of it."

"Don't you care for what I would have done for you — should n't you have liked it?"

"Of course one likes kindness — one likes money. But it 's all over," Nick repeated. Then he added: "I fatigue you, I knock you up, with telling you these uncomfortable things. I only do so because it seems to me right you should know. But don't be worried — everything will be all right."

He patted his companion's hand reassuringly, he leaned over him affectionately; but Mr. Carteret was not easily soothed. He had practiced lucidity all his life, he had expected it of others, and he had never given his assent to an indistinct proposition. He was weak, but he was not too weak to perceive that he had formed a calculation which was now vitiated by a wrong factor — put his name to a contract of which the other side had not been carried out. More than fifty years of conscious success pressed him to try to understand; he had never muddled his affairs and he could n't muddle them now. At the same time he was aware of the necessity of economizing his effort, and he evidently gathered himself, within, patiently and almost cunningly, for the right question and the right induction. He was still able to make his agitation reflective, and it could still consort with his high hopes of Nick that he should find himself regarding the declaration that everything would be all right as an inadequate guarantee. So, after he had looked

a moment into his companion's eyes, he inquired:

"Have you done anything bad?"

"Nothing worse than usual," laughed Nick.

"Everything should have been better than usual."

"Ah, well, it has n't been that — that I must say."

"Do you sometimes think of your father?" Mr. Carteret continued.

Nick hesitated a moment. "*You* make me think of him — you have always that pleasant effect."

"His name would have lived — it must n't be lost."

"Yes, but the competition to-day is terrible," Nick replied.

Mr. Carteret considered this a moment, as if he found a serious flaw in it; after which he began again: "I never supposed you were a trifler."

"I 'm determined not to be."

"I thought her charming. Don't you love her?" Mr. Carteret asked.

"Don't ask me that to-day, for I feel sore and resentful. I don't think she has treated me well."

"You should have held her — you should n't have let her go," the old man returned, with unexpected fire.

His companion flushed, at this, so strange it seemed to him to receive a lesson in energy from a dying octogenarian. Yet after an instant Nick

answered, modestly enough: "I have n't been clever enough, no doubt."

"Don't say that — don't say that," Mr. Carteret murmured, looking almost frightened. "Don't think I can allow you any mitigation of that sort. I know how well you 've done. You 're taking your place. Several gentlemen have told me. Has n't she felt a scruple, knowing my settlement on you was contingent?" he pursued.

"Oh, she has n't known — has n't known anything about it."

"I don't understand; though I think you explained somewhat, a year ago," Mr. Carteret said, with discouragement. "I think she wanted to speak to me — of any intentions I might have, in regard to you — the day she was here. Very nicely, very properly, she would have done it, I 'm sure. I think her idea was that I ought to make any settlement quite independent of your marrying her or not marrying her. But I tried to convey to her — I don't know whether she understood me — that I liked her too much for that, I wanted too much to make sure of her."

"To make sure of me, you mean," said Nick. "And now, after all, you see you have n't."

"Well, perhaps it was that," sighed the old man, confusedly.

"All this is very bad for you — we 'll talk again," Nick rejoined.

"No, no — let us finish it now. I like to know what I 'm doing. I shall rest better when I do

know. There are great things to be done; the future will be full — the future will be fine," Mr. Carteret wandered.

"Let me say this for Julia: that if we had n't been sundered her generosity to me would have been complete, she would have put her great fortune absolutely at my disposal," Nick said, after a moment. "Her consciousness of all that naturally carries her over any particular distress in regard to what won't come to me now from another source."

"Ah, don't lose it," pleaded the old man, painfully.

"It 's in your hands, sir," reasoned Nick.

"I mean Mrs. Dallow's fortune. It will be of the highest utility. That was what your father missed."

"I shall miss more than my father did," said Nick.

"She 'll come back to you — I can't look at you and doubt that."

Nick shook his head slowly, smiling. "Never, never, never! You look at me, my grand old friend, but you don't see me. I 'm not what you think."

"What is it — what is it? *Have* you been bad?" Mr. Carteret panted.

"No, no; I 'm not bad. But I 'm different."

"Different?"

"Different from my father — different from Mrs. Dallow — different from you."

"Ah, why do you perplex me?" moaned the old man. "You've done something."

"I don't want to perplex you, but I *have* done something," said Nick, getting up.

He had heard the door open softly behind him and Mrs. Lendon come forward with precautions. "What has he done — what has he done?" quavered Mr. Carteret to his sister. She, however, after a glance at the patient, motioned Nick away, and, bending over the bed, replied, in a voice expressive at that moment of a sharply contrasted plenitude of vital comfort:

"He has only excited you, I'm afraid, a little more than is good for you. Isn't your dear old head a little too high?" Nick regarded himself as justly banished, and he quitted the room with a ready acquiescence in any power to carry on the scene of which Mrs. Lendon might find herself possessed. He felt distinctly brutal as he heard his host emit a soft, troubled exhalation of assent to some change of position. But he would have reproached himself more if he had wished less to guard against the acceptance of an equivalent for duties unperformed. Mr. Carteret had had in his mind, characteristically, the idea of an enlightened agreement, and there was something more to be said about that.

Nick went out of the house and stayed away for two or three hours, quite ready to consider that the place was quieter and safer without him. He haunted the abbey, as usual, and sat a long

time in its simplifying stillness, turning over many things. He came into the house again at the luncheon-hour, through the garden, and heard, somewhat to his surprise and greatly to his relief, that Mr. Carteret had composed himself promptly enough after their agitating interview. Mrs. Lendon talked at luncheon much as if she expected her brother to be, as she said, really quite fit again. She asked Nick no embarrassing question; which was uncommonly good of her, he thought, considering that she might have said, "What in the world were you trying to get out of him?" She only told our young man that the invalid had very little doubt he should be able to see him again, about half past seven, for a *very* short time: this gentle emphasis was Mrs. Lendon's single tribute to the critical spirit. Nick divined that Mr. Carteret's desire for further explanations was really strong and had been capable of sustaining him through a bad morning — capable even of helping him (it would be a secret and wonderful momentary victory over his weakness) to pass it off for a good one. He wished he might make a sketch of him, from the life, as he had seen him after breakfast; he had a conviction he could make a strong one, and it would be a precious memento. But he shrank from proposing this — Mr. Carteret might think it unparliamentary. The doctor had called while Nick was out, and he came again at five o'clock, without our young man's seeing him. Nick was busy,

in his room, at that hour: he wrote a short letter which took him a long time. But apparently there had been no veto on a resumption of talk, for at half past seven the old man sent for him. The nurse, at the door, said, "Only a moment, I hope, sir?" but she took him in and then withdrew.

The prolonged daylight was in the room, and Mr. Carteret was again established on his pile of pillows, but with his head a little lower. Nick sat down by him and began to express the hope that he had not upset him in the morning; but the old man, with fixed, expanded eyes, took up their conversation exactly where they had left it.

"What have you done — what have you done? Have you associated yourself with some other woman?"

"No, no; I don't think she can accuse me of that."

"Well, then, she'll come back to you, if you take the right way with her."

It might have been droll to hear Mr. Carteret, in his situation, giving his views on the right way with women; but Nick was not moved to enjoy that diversion. "I've taken the wrong way. I've done something which will spoil my prospects in that direction forever. I've written a letter," Nick went on; but his companion had already interrupted him.

"You've written a letter?"

"To my constituents, informing them of my determination to resign my seat."

"To resign your seat?"

"I 've made up my mind, after no end of reflection, dear Mr. Carteret, to work in a different line. I have a project of becoming a painter. So I 've given up the idea of a political life."

"A painter?" Mr. Carteret seemed to turn whiter.

"I 'm going in for the portrait, in oils: it sounds absurd, I know, and I only mention it to show you that I don't in the least expect you to count upon me." Mr. Carteret had continued to stare, at first; then his eyes slowly closed and he lay motionless and blank. "Don't let it trouble you now; it 's a long story and rather a poor one; when you get better I 'll tell you all about it. We 'll talk it over amicably, and I 'll bring you to my side," Nick went on, hypocritically. He had laid his hand on Mr. Carteret's again: it felt cold, and as the old man remained silent he had a moment of exaggerated fear.

"This is dreadful news," said Mr. Carteret, opening his eyes.

"Certainly it must seem so to you, for I 've always kept from you (I was ashamed, and my present confusion is a just chastisement) the great interest I have always taken in the" — Nick hesitated, and then added, with an intention of humor and a sense of foolishness — "in the pencil and the brush." He spoke of his present

confusion; but it must be confessed that his manner showed it but little. He was surprised at his own serenity, and had to recognize that at the point things had come to now he was profoundly obstinate and quiet.

"The pencil — the brush? They're not the weapons of a gentleman," said Mr. Carteret.

"I was sure that would be your view. I repeat that I mention them only because you once said you intended to do something for me, as the phrase is, and I thought you ought n't to do it in ignorance."

"My ignorance was better. Such knowledge is n't good for me."

"Forgive me, my dear old friend. When you are better you 'll see it differently."

"I shall never be better now."

"Ah, no," pleaded Nick, "it will do you good, after a little. Think it over quietly, and you 'll be glad I 've stopped being a humbug."

"I loved you — I loved you as my son," moaned the old man.

Nick sank on his knee beside the bed and leaned over him tenderly. "Get better, get better, and I 'll be your son for the rest of your life."

"Poor Dormer — poor Dormer!" Mr. Carteret softly wailed.

"I admit that if he had lived I probably should n't have done it," said Nick. "I dare say I should have deferred to his prejudices, even if I thought them narrow."

"Do you turn against your father?" Mr. Carteret asked, making, to disengage his arm from the young man's touch, an effort in which Nick recognized the irritation of conscious weakness. Nick got up, at this, and stood a moment looking down at him, while Mr. Carteret went on: "Do you give up your name, do you give up your country?"

"If I do something good my country may like it," Nick contended.

"Do you regard them as equal, the two glories?"

"Here comes your nurse, to blow me up and turn me out," said Nick.

The nurse had come in, but Mr. Carteret managed to direct to her an audible, dry, courteous "Be so good as to wait till I send for you," which arrested her, in the large room, at some distance from the bed, and then had the effect of making her turn on her heel with a professional laugh. She appeared to think that an old gentleman with the fine manner of his prime might still be trusted to take care of himself. When she had gone Mr. Carteret went on, addressing Nick, with the inquiry for which his deep displeasure lent him strength: "Do you pretend there is a nobler life than a high political career?"

"I think the noble life is doing one's work well. One can do it very ill, and be very base and mean, in what you call a high political career. I have n't been in the House so many months

without finding that out. It contains some very small souls."

"You should stand against them — you should expose them!" stammered Mr. Carteret.

"Stand against them, against one's own party?"

The old man looked bewildered, a moment, at this; then he broke out: "God forgive you, are you a Tory — are you a Tory?"

"How little you understand me!" laughed Nick, with a ring of bitterness.

"Little enough — little enough, my boy. Have you sent your electors your dreadful letter?"

"Not yet; but it's all ready, and I sha'n't change my mind."

"You will — you will; you'll think better of it, you'll see your duty," said the old man, almost coaxingly.

"That seems very improbable, for my determination, crudely and abruptly as, to my great regret, it comes to you here, is the fruit of a long and painful struggle. The difficulty is that I see my duty just in this other effort."

"An effort? Do you call it an effort to fall away, to sink far down, to give up *every* effort? What does your mother say, heaven help her?" Mr. Carteret pursued, before Nick could answer the other question.

"I have n't told her yet."

"You're ashamed, you're ashamed!" Nick only looked out of the western window, at this;

he felt himself growing red. "Tell her it would have been sixty thousand; I had the money all ready."

"I sha'n't tell her that," said Nick, redder still.

"Poor woman — poor dear woman!" Mr. Carteret whimpered.

"Yes, indeed; she won't like it."

"Think it all over again; don't throw away a splendid future!" These words were uttered with a recovering flicker of passion. Nick Dormer had never heard such an accent on his old friend's lips. But the next instant Mr. Carteret began to murmur, "I'm tired — I'm very tired," and sank back with a groan and with closed lips.

Nick assured him, tenderly, that he had only too much cause to be exhausted, but that the worst was over now. He smoothed his pillows for him and said he must leave him, he would send in the nurse.

"Come back — come back," Mr. Carteret pleaded, before he quitted him; "come back and tell me it's a horrible dream."

Nick did go back, very late that evening; Mr. Carteret had sent a message to his room. But one of the nurses was on the ground this time, and she remained there, with her watch in her hand. The invalid's chamber was shrouded and darkened; the shaded candle left the bed in gloom. Nick's interview with his venerable host was the affair of but a moment; the nurse inter-

posed, impatient and not understanding. She heard Nick tell Mr. Carteret that he had posted his letter now, and Mr. Carteret flashed out, with an acerbity which savored still of the sordid associations of a world he had not done with: "Then of course my settlement does n't take effect!"

"Oh, that 's all right," Nick answered, kindly; and he went off the next morning by the early train — his injured host was still sleeping. Mrs. Lendon's habits made it easy for her to be present, in matutinal bloom, at the young man's hasty breakfast, and she sent a particular remembrance to Lady Agnes and (when Nick should see them) to the Ladies Flora and Elizabeth. Nick had a prevision of the spirit in which his mother, at least, would now receive hollow compliments from Beauclere.

The night before, as soon as he had quitted Mr. Carteret, the old man said to the nurse that he wished her to tell Mr. Chayter that, the first thing in the morning, he must go and fetch Mr. Mitton. Mr. Mitton was the first solicitor at Beauclere.

XXXIV.

THE really formidable thing, for Nick, was to tell his mother: a truth of which he was so conscious that he had the matter out with her the very morning he returned from Beauclere. She and Grace had come back, the afternoon before, from Lady St. Dunstan's, and knowing this (she had written him her intention, from the country), he drove straight from the station to Calcutta Gardens. There was a little room there, on the right of the house-door, which was known as his own room, but in which of a morning, when he was not at home, Lady Agnes sometimes wrote her letters. These were always numerous, and when she heard our young man's cab she happened to be engaged with them at the big brass-mounted bureau which had belonged to his father, where, amid a margin of works of political reference, she seemed to herself to make public affairs feel the point of her elbow.

She came into the hall to meet her son and to hear about Mr. Carteret, and Nick went straight back into the room with her and closed the door. It would be in the evening paper and she would see it, and he had no right to allow her to wait for that. It proved indeed a terrible hour; and

when, ten minutes later, Grace, who learned upstairs that her brother had come back, went down for further news of him, she heard from the hall a sound of voices which made her first pause and then retrace her steps on tiptoe. She mounted to the drawing-room and crept about there, palpitating, looking at moments into the dull street and wondering what on earth was going on. She had no one to express her wonder to, for Florence Tressilian had departed and Biddy, after breakfast, had betaken herself, in accordance with a custom now inveterate, to Rosedale Road. Her mother was crying, passionately — a circumstance tremendous in its significance, for Lady Agnes had not often been brought so low. Nick had seen her cry, but this almost awful spectacle had seldom been given to Grace; and it forced her to believe at present that some dreadful thing had happened.

That was of course in order, after Nick's mysterious quarrel with Julia, which had made his mother so ill and which now apparently had been followed up with new horrors. The row, as Grace mentally phrased it, had had something to do with this incident, some deeper depth of disappointment had opened up. Grace asked herself if they were talking about Broadwood; if Nick had demanded that, in the conditions so unpleasantly altered, Lady Agnes should restore that pretty property to its owner. This was very possible, but why should he so suddenly

have broken out about it? And moreover their mother, though sore to bleeding about the whole business — for Broadwood, in its fresh comfort, was too delightful — would not have met this pretension with tears, inasmuch as she had already declared that they could n't decently continue to make use of the place. Julia had said that of course they must go on, but Lady Agnes was prepared with an effective rejoinder to this. It did n't consist of words — it was to be austerely practical, was to consist of letting Julia see, at the moment she should least expect it, that they quite would n't go on. Lady Agnes was ostensibly waiting for that moment — the moment when her renunciation would be most impressive.

Grace was conscious of how, for many days, her mother and she had been moving in darkness, deeply stricken by Nick's culpable (oh, he was culpable !) loss of his prize, but feeling there was an element in the matter they did n't grasp, an undiscovered explanation which would perhaps make it still worse, though it might make *them* a little better. Nick had explained nothing; he had simply said, "Dear mother, we don't hit it off, after all; it 's an awful bore, but we don't," as if that were, under the circumstances, an adequate balm for two aching hearts. From Julia, naturally, satisfying attenuations were not to be looked for; and though Julia very often did the thing you would n't suppose she was not unexpectedly apologetic in this case. Grace recog-

nized that in such a position it would savor of apology for her to impart to Lady Agnes her grounds for letting Nick off; and she would not have liked to be the person to suggest to Julia that any one looked for anything from her. Neither of the disunited pair blamed the other or cast an aspersion, and it was all very magnanimous and superior and impenetrable and exasperating. With all this Grace had a suspicion that Biddy knew something more, that for Biddy the tormenting curtain had been lifted.

Biddy came and went, in these days, with a perceptible air of detachment from the tribulations of home. It made her, fortunately, very pretty — still prettier than usual; it sometimes happened that at moments when Grace was most angry she had a faint, sweet smile which might have been drawn from a source of private consolation. It was perhaps in some degree connected with Peter Sherringham's visit, as to which the girl was not silent. When Grace asked her if she had secret information and if it pointed to the idea that everything would be all right in the end, she pretended to know nothing (What should she know? she asked, with the loveliest candor), and begged her sister not to let Lady Agnes believe that she was any better off than they. She contributed nothing to their gropings toward the light save a better patience than theirs, but she went with noticeable regularity, on the pretext of her foolish modeling, to Rose-

dale Road. She was frankly on Nick's side; not going so far as to say he had been right, but saying distinctly that she was sure that, whatever had happened, he could n't help it. This was striking, because, as Grace knew, the younger of the sisters had been much favored by Julia and would not have sacrificed her easily. It associated itself in the irritated mind of the elder with Biddy's frequent visits to the studio, and made Miss Dormer ask herself whether the crisis in Nick's and Julia's business had not somehow been linked to that unnatural spot.

She had gone there two or three times, while Biddy was working, to pick up any clue to the mystery that might peep out. But she had put her hand upon nothing, save once on the personality of Gabriel Nash. She found this strange creature, to her surprise, paying a visit to her sister — he had come for Nick, who was absent; she remembered how they had met him in Paris and how he had frightened her. When she asked Biddy afterwards how she could receive him that way, Biddy replied that even she, Grace, would have some charity for him if she could hear how fond he was of poor Nick. He talked to her only of Nick — of nothing else. Grace observed how she spoke of Nick as injured, and noted the implication that some one else had ceased to be fond of him and was thereby condemned in Biddy's eyes. It seemed to Grace that some one else had at least a right not to like some of his

friends. The studio struck her as mean and horrid: and so far from suggesting to her that it could have played a part in making Nick and Julia fall out, she only felt how little its dusty want of consequence could count, one way or the other, for Julia. Grace, who had opinions on art, saw no merit whatever in those "impressions," on canvas, from Nick's hand, with which the place was bestrewn. She did n't wish her brother to have talent in that direction; yet it was secretly humiliating to her that he had not more.

Nick felt a pang of almost horrified penitence, in the little room on the right of the hall, the moment after he had made his mother really understand that he had thrown up his seat, that it would probably be in the evening papers. That she would take it badly was an idea that had pressed upon him hard enough; but she took it even worse than he had feared. He measured, in the look that she gave him when the full truth loomed upon her, the mortal cruelty of her discomfiture; her face was like that of a passenger on a ship who sees the huge bows of another vessel towering close, out of the fog. There are visions of dismay before which the best conscience recoils; and though Nick had made his choice on all the grounds, there were a few minutes in which he would gladly have admitted that his wisdom was a dark mistake. His heart was in his throat, he had gone too far; he had been

ready to disappoint his mother — he had not been ready to destroy her.

Lady Agnes, I hasten to add, was not destroyed; she made, after her first drowning gasp, a tremendous scene of opposition, in the face of which Nick speedily fell back upon his intrenchments. She must know the worst, he had thought: so he told her everything, including the little story of the forfeiture of his "expectations" from Mr. Carteret. He showed her this time not only the face of the matter, but what lay below it; narrated briefly the incident in his studio which had led to Julia Dallow's deciding that she could n't after all put up with him. This was wholly new to Lady Agnes, she had had no clue to it, and he could instantly see how it made the case worse for her, adding a hideous positive to an abominable negative. He perceived, now, that, distressed and distracted as she had been by his rupture with Julia, she had still held to the faith that their engagement would come on again; believing evidently that he had a personal empire over the mistress of Harsh which would bring her back. Lady Agnes was forced to recognize that empire as precarious, to forswear the hope of a blessed renewal, from the moment it was a question of base infatuations on his own part. Nick confessed to an infatuation, but did his best to show her it was not base; that it was not (since Julia had had faith in his loyalty) for the person of the young lady who had been dis-

covered posturing to him and whom he had seen but half a dozen times in his life. He endeavored to give his mother a notion of who this young lady was and to remind her of the occasion, in Paris, when they all had seen her together. But Lady Agnes's mind and memory were a blank on the subject of Miss Miriam Rooth, and she wanted to know nothing whatever about her: it was enough that she was the cause of their ruin, that she was mixed up with his unspeakable folly. Her ladyship needed to know nothing of Miss Rooth to allude to her as if it were superfluous to give a definite name to the class to which she belonged.

But she gave a name to the group in which Nick had now taken his place, and it made him feel, after the lapse of years, like a small blamed, sorry boy again; for it was so far away he could scarcely remember it (besides there having been but a moment or two of that sort in his happy childhood), the time when his mother had slapped him and called him a little fool. He was a big fool now — a huge, immeasurable one; she repeated the term over and over, with high-pitched passion. The most painful thing in this painful hour was perhaps his glimpse of the strange feminine cynicism that lurked in her fine sense of injury. Where there was such a complexity of revolt it would have been difficult to pick out particular complaints; but Nick could see that, to Lady Agnes's imagination, he was most a fool

for not having kept his relations with the actress, whatever they were, better from Julia's knowledge. He remained indeed freshly surprised at the ardor with which she had rested her hopes on Julia. Julia was certainly a combination — she was fascinating, she was a sort of leading woman and she was rich; but after all (putting aside what she might be to a man in love with her), she was not the keystone of the universe. Yet the form in which the consequences of his apostasy appeared most to come home to Lady Agnes was the loss, for the Dormer family, of the advantages attached to the possession of Mrs. Dallow. The larger mortification would round itself later; for the hour the damning thing was that Nick had really made Julia a present of an unforgivable grievance. He had clinched their separation by his letter to his electors; and that, above all, was the wickedness of the letter. Julia would have got over the other woman, but she would never get over his becoming a nobody.

Lady Agnes challenged him upon this low prospect exactly as if he had embraced it with the malignant purpose of making Julia's return impossible. She contradicted her premises and lost her way in her wrath. What had made him suddenly turn round if he had been in good faith before? He had never been in good faith — never, never; he had had from his earliest childhood the nastiest hankerings after a vulgar little daubing, trash-talking life; they were not in him,

the grander, nobler aspirations — they never had been — and he had been anything but honest to lead her on, to lead them all on, to think he would do something: the fall and the shame would have been less for them if they had come earlier. Moreover, what need under heaven had he to tell Charles Carteret of his cruel folly on his very death-bed? — as if he might n't have let it all alone and accepted the benefit the old man was so delighted to confer. No wonder the old man would keep his money for his heirs, if that was the way Nick proposed to repay him; but where was the common sense, where was the common charity, where was the common decency, of tormenting him with such vile news in his last hours? Was he trying what he could invent that would break her heart, that would send her in sorrow down to her grave? Were n't they all miserable enough, and had n't he a ray of pity for his wretched sisters?

The relation of effect and cause, in regard to his sisters' wretchedness, was but dimly discernible to Nick, who, however, easily perceived that his mother genuinely considered that his action had disconnected them all, still more than she held they were already disconnected, from the good things of life. Julia was money, Mr. Carteret was money, and everything else was poverty. If these precious people had been primarily money for Nick, it was after all a gracious tribute to his distributive power to have taken

for granted that for the rest of the family too the difference would have been so great. For days, for weeks and months afterward, the little room on the right of the hall seemed to our young man to vibrate, as if the very walls and window-panes still suffered, with the most disagreeable ordeal he had ever been through.

XXXV.

THAT evening — the evening of his return from Beauclere — Nick was conscious of a keen desire to get away, to go abroad, to leave behind him the little chatter his resignation would be sure to produce in an age of publicity which never discriminated as to the quality of events. Then he felt it was better to stay, to see the business through on the spot. Besides, he would have to meet his constituents (would a parcel of cheese-eating burgesses ever have been "met" on so queer an occasion?) and when that was over the worst would be over. Nick had an idea that he knew in advance how it would feel to be pointed at as a person who had given up a considerable chance of eventual "office" to take likenesses at so much a head. He would n't attempt, down at Harsh, to touch on the question of motive; for, given the nature of the public mind of Harsh, that would be a strain on his faculty of expression. But as regards the chaff of the political world and of society, he had an idea he should find chaff enough for answers. It was true that when his mother "chaffed" him, in her own effective way, he had felt rather flattened out; but then one's mother might have a heavier hand than any one else.

He had not thrown up the House of Commons to amuse himself; he had thrown it up to work, to sit quietly down and bend over his task. If he should go abroad his mother might think he had some weak-minded view of joining Julia Dallow and trying, with however little hope, to win her back — an illusion it would be singularly pernicious to encourage. His desire for Julia's society had succumbed, for the present at any rate, to an irresistible interruption — he had become more and more conscious that they spoke a different language. Nick felt like a young man who has gone to the Rhineland to "get up" his German for an examination — committed to talk, to read, to dream only in the new idiom. Now that he had taken his jump everything was simplified, at the same time that everything was pitched in a higher, more excited key; and he wondered how, in the absence of a common dialect, he had conversed, on the whole so happily, with Julia. Then he had after-tastes of understandings tolerably independent of words. He was excited, because every fresh responsibility is exciting, and there was no manner of doubt that he had accepted one. No one knew what it was but himself (Gabriel Nash scarcely counted — his whole attitude on the question of responsibility was so fantastic), and he would have to ask his dearest friends to take him on trust. Rather, he would ask nothing of any one, but would cultivate independence, mulishness and gayety and fix his

thoughts on a bright if distant morrow. It was disagreeable to have to remember that his task would not be sweetened by a sense of heroism; for if it might be heroic to give up the muses for the strife of great affairs, no romantic glamour worth speaking of would ever gather round an Englishman who, in the prime of his strength, had given up great, or even small, affairs for the muses. Such an original might himself, privately, perversely regard certain phases of this inferior commerce as a great affair; but who would give him the benefit of that sort of confidence — except indeed a faithful, clever, excited little sister Biddy, if he should have the good luck to have one? Biddy was in fact all ready for heroic flights and eager to think she might fight the battle of the beautiful by her brother's side; so that Nick had really to moderate her and remind her that his actual job was not a crusade, with bugles and banners, but a gray, sedentary grind, whose charm was all at the core. You might have an emotion about it, and an emotion that would be a help, but this was not the sort of thing you could show — the end in view would seem ridiculously small for it. Nick asked Biddy how one could talk to people about the "responsibility" of what she would see him pottering at in his studio.

Nick therefore did n't talk any more than he was forced to, having moreover a sense that that side of the situation would be plentifully looked

after by Gabriel Nash. He left the burden of explanation to others, meeting them on the ground of inexhaustible satire. He saw that he should live for months in a thick cloud of irony, not the finest air of the season, and he adopted the weapon to which a person whose use of tobacco is only occasional resorts when every one else produces a cigar — he puffed the empirical, defensive cigarette. He accepted the idea of a mystery in his behavior, and abounded so in that sense that his critics were themselves bewildered. Some of them felt that they got, as the phrase is, little out of him — he rose, in his good-humor, so much higher than the "rise" they had looked for — on his very first encounter with the world after his scrimmage with his mother. He went to a dinner-party (he had accepted the invitation many days before), having seen his resignation, in the form of a telegram from Harsh, announced in the evening papers. The people he found there had seen it as well, and the most imaginative of them wanted to know what he was going to do. Even the least imaginative asked if it were true he had changed his politics. He gave different answers to different persons, but left most of them under the impression that he had remarkable conscientious scruples. This, however, was not a formidable occasion, for there happened to be no one present he was particularly fond of. There were old friends whom it would not be so easy to satisfy — Nick was

almost sorry, for an hour, that he had so many old friends. If he had had more enemies the case would have been simpler; and he was fully aware that the hardest thing of all would be to be let off too easily. Then he would appear to himself to have been put on his generosity, and his deviation would wear its ugliest face.

When he left the place at which he had been dining he betook himself to Rosedale Road: he saw no reason why he should go down to the House, though he knew he had not done with that yet. He had a dread of behaving as if he supposed he should be expected to make a farewell speech, and was thankful his eminence was not of a nature to create, on such an occasion, a demand for his oratory. He had, in fact, nothing whatever to say in public — not a word, not a syllable. Though the hour was late he found Gabriel Nash established in his studio, drawn thither by the fine exhilaration of having seen an evening paper. Trying it late, on the chance, he had been told by Nick's servant that Nick would sleep there that night, and he had come in to wait, he was so eager to congratulate him. Nick submitted with a good grace to his society — he was tired enough to go to bed, but he was restless too — in spite of feeling now, oddly enough, that Nash's congratulations could add little to his fortitude. He had felt a good deal, before, as if he were in Nash's hands; but now that he had made his final choice he seemed to himself to be

altogether in his own. Gabriel was wonderful, but no Gabriel could assist him much henceforth.

Gabriel was indeed more wonderful than ever, while he lolled on a divan and emitted a series of reflections which were even more ingenious than opportune. Nick walked up and down the room, and it might have been supposed from his manner that he was impatient for his visitor to withdraw. This idea would have been contradicted, however, by the fact that subsequently, after Nash had taken leave, he continued to perambulate. He had grown used to Nash — had a sense that he had heard all he had to say. That was one's penalty with persons whose main gift was for talk, however irrigating; talk engendered a sense of sameness much sooner than action. The things a man did were necessarily more different from each other than the things he said, even if he went in for surprising you. Nick felt Nash could never surprise him any more save by doing something.

He talked of his host's future, he talked of Miriam Rooth and of Peter Sherringham, whom he had seen at Miriam Rooth's and whom he described as in a predicament delightful to behold. Nick asked a question or two about Peter's predicament, and learned, rather to his disappointment, that it consisted only of the fact that he was in love with Miriam. He requested his visitor to do better than this; whereupon Nash added the touch that Sherringham would n't be

able to have her. "Oh, they have ideas!" he said, when Nick asked him why.

"What ideas? So has he, I suppose."

"Yes, but they're not the same."

"Oh well, they'll arrange something," said Nick.

"You'll have to help them a bit. She's in love with another man," Nash returned.

"Do you mean with you?"

"Oh, I'm never another man," said Nash; "I'm more the wrong one than the man himself. It's you she's after." And upon Nick's asking him what he meant by this he added: "While you were engaged in transferring her image to your sensorium, you stamped your own upon hers."

Nick stopped in his walk, staring. "Ah, what a bore!"

"A bore? Don't you think she's agreeable?"

Nick hesitated. "I wanted to go on with her — now I can't."

"My dear fellow, it only makes her handsomer: I wondered what was the matter with her."

"Oh, that's twaddle," said Nick, turning away. "Besides, has she told you?"

"No, but her mother has."

"Has she told her mother?"

"Mrs. Rooth says not. But I have known Mrs. Rooth to say that which is n't."

"Apply that rule, then, to the information you speak of."

"Well, since you press me, I know more," said Nash. "Miriam knows you are engaged to a certain lady; she told me as much, told me she had seen her here. That was enough to set Miriam off — she likes forbidden fruit."

"I 'm not engaged to any lady. I was, but we 've altered our minds."

"Ah, what a pity!" sighed Nash.

"Mephistopheles!" Nick rejoined, stopping again and looking at his visitor gravely.

"Pray, whom do you call Margaret? May I ask if your failure of interest in the political situation is the cause of this change in your personal one?" Nash went on. Nick signified to him that he might not; whereupon Gabriel added: "I am not in the least devilish — I only mean it 's a pity you 've altered your minds, because now perhaps Miriam will alter hers. She goes from one thing to another. However, I won't tell her."

"I will, then," said Nick, between jest and earnest.

"Would that really be prudent?" Nash asked, with an intonation that made hilarity prevail.

"At any rate," Nick resumed, "nothing would induce me to interfere with Peter Sherringham. That sounds fatuous, but to you I don't mind appearing an ass."

"The thing would be to get Sherringham — out of spite — to entangle himself with another woman."

"What good would that do?"

"Oh, Miriam would begin to fancy him then."

"Spite surely is n't a conceivable motive — for a healthy man."

"Ah, Sherringham is n't a healthy man. He 's too much in love."

"Then he won't care for another woman."

"He would try to, and that would produce its effect — its effect on Miriam."

"You talk like an American novel. Let him try, and God keep us all straight." Nick thought, in extreme silence, of his poor little Biddy and hoped — he would have to see to it a little — that Peter would n't "try" on her. He changed the subject and, before Nash went away, took occasion to remark to him — the occasion was offered by some new allusion of the visitor's to the sport he hoped to extract from seeing Nick carry out everything to which he stood committed — that the great comedy would fall very flat, the great incident would pass unnoticed.

"Oh, if you 'll simply do your part I 'll take care of the rest," said Nash.

"If you mean by doing my part working like a beaver, it 's all right," Nick replied.

"Ah, you reprobate, you 'll become a fashionable painter, a P. R. A.!" his companion groaned, getting up to go.

When he had gone Nick threw himself back on the cushions of the divan and, with his hands locked above his head, sat a long time lost in

thought. He had sent his servant to bed; he was unmolested. He gazed before him into the gloom produced by the unheeded burning out of the last candle. The vague outer light came in through the tall studio window, and the painted images, ranged about, looked confused in the dusk. If his mother had seen him she might have thought he was staring at his father's ghost.

XXXVI.

THE night Peter Sherringham walked away from Balaklava Place with Gabriel Nash, the talk of the two men directed itself, as was natural under the circumstances, to the question of Miriam's future renown and the pace, as Nash called it, at which she would go. Critical spirits as they both were, and one of them as dissimulative in passion as the other was paradoxical in the absence of it, they yet took this renown for granted as completely as the simple-minded, a pair of hot spectators in the pit, might have done, and exchanged observations on the assumption that the only uncertain element would be the pace. This was a proof of general subjugation. Peter wished not to show, but he wished to know; and in the restlessness of his anxiety he was ready even to risk exposure, great as the sacrifice might be of the imperturbable, urbane skepticism most appropriate to a secretary of embassy. He was unable to rid himself of the sense that Gabriel Nash had got up earlier than he, had had opportunities in days already distant, the days of Mrs. Rooth's hungry foreign rambles. Something of authority and privilege stuck to him from this, and it made Sherringham still more uncomfort-

able when he was most conscious that, at the best, even the trained diplomatic mind would never get a grasp of Miriam as a whole. She was constructed to revolve like the terrestrial globe; some part or other of her was always out of sight or in shadow.

Sherringham talked to conceal his feelings, and, like every man doing a thing from that sort of intention, did it perhaps too much. They agreed that, putting strange accidents aside, Miriam would go further than any one had gone, in England at least, and within the memory of man; and that it was a pity, as regards marking the comparison, that for so long no one had gone any distance worth speaking of. They further agreed that it would naturally seem absurd to any one who did n't know, their prophesying such big things on such small evidence; and they agreed lastly that the absurdity quite vanished as soon as the prophets knew as *they* knew. Their knowledge (they quite recognized this) was simply confidence raised to a high point — the communication of the girl's own confidence. The conditions were enormously to make, but it was of the very essence of Miriam's confidence that she would make them. The parts, the plays, the theatres, the "support," the audiences, the critics, the money were all to be found, but she cast a spell which prevented that from seeming a serious hitch. One might not see from one day to the other what she would do or how she would

do it, but she would none the less go on. She would have to construct her own road, as it were, but at the worst there would only be delays in making it. These delays would depend on the hardness of the stones she had to break.

As Sherringham had perceived, you never knew where to "have" Gabriel Nash; a truth exemplified in his unexpected delight at the prospect of Miriam's drawing forth the modernness of the age. You might have thought he would loathe that modernness; but he had a brilliant, amused, amusing vision of it — saw it as something huge and fantastically vulgar. Its vulgarity would rise to the grand style, like that of a London railway station, and Miriam's publicity would be as big as the globe itself. All the machinery was ready, the platform laid; the facilities, the wires and bells and trumpets, the colossal, deafening newspaperism of the period — its most distinctive sign — were waiting for her, their predestined mistress, to press her foot on the spring and set them all in motion. Gabriel brushed in a large bright picture of her progress through the time and round the world, round it and round it again, from continent to continent and clime to clime; with populations and deputations, reporters and photographers, placards and interviews and banquets, steamers, railways, dollars, diamonds, speeches and artistic ruin all jumbled into her train. Regardless of expense the spectacle would be and thrilling, though

somewhat monotonous the drama — a drama more bustling than any she would put on the stage and a spectacle that would beat everything for scenery. In the end her divine voice would crack, screaming to foreign ears and antipodal barbarians, and her clever manner would lose all quality, simplified to a few unmistakable knock-down dodges. Then she would be at the fine climax of life and glory, still young and insatiate, but already coarse, hard and raddled, with nothing left to do and nothing left to do it with, the remaining years all before her and the *raison d'être* all behind. It would be curious and magnificent and grotesque.

"Oh, she 'll have some good years — they 'll be worth having," Sherringham insisted, as they went. "Besides, you see her too much as a humbug and too little as a real producer. She has ideas — great ones; she loves the thing for itself. That may keep a woman serious."

"Her greatest idea must always be to show herself; and fortunately she has a splendid self to show. I think of her absolutely as a real producer, but as a producer whose production is her own person. No 'person,' even as fine a one as hers, will stand that for more than an hour, so that humbuggery has very soon to lend a hand. However," Nash continued, "if she 's a fine humbug it will do as well, and perfectly suit the time. We can all be saved by vulgarity; that 's the solvent of all difficulties and the blessing of this

delightful age. Let no man despair; a new hope has dawned."

"She 'll do her work like any other worker, with the advantage over many that her talent is rare," Peter replied. "Compared with the life of many women, that 's security and sanity of the highest order. Then she can't help her beauty. You can't vulgarize that."

"Oh, can't you?" exclaimed Gabriel Nash.

"It will abide with her till the day of her death. It is n't a mere superficial freshness. She 's very noble."

"Yes, that 's the pity of it," said Nash. "She 's a capital girl, and I quite admit that she 'll do, for a while, a lot of good. She will have brightened up the world for a great many people; she will have brought the ideal nearer to them, held it fast, for an hour, with its feet on earth and its great wings trembling. That 's always something, for blessed is he who has dropped even the smallest coin into the little iron box that contains the precious savings of mankind. Miriam will doubtless have dropped a big gold piece. It will be found, in the general scramble, on the day the race goes bankrupt. And then, for herself, she will have had a great go at life."

"Oh, yes, she 'll have got out of her hole; she won't have vegetated," said Sherringham. "That makes her touching to me; it adds to the many good reasons for which one may want to help her. She 's tackling a big job, and tackling it by

herself; throwing herself upon the world, in good faith, and dealing with it as she can; meeting alone, in her youth, her beauty, her generosity, all the embarrassments of notoriety and all the difficulties of a profession of which, if one half is what 's called brilliant, the other half is odious."

"She has great courage, but should you speak of her as solitary, with such a lot of us all round her?" Gabriel asked.

"She 's a great thing for you and me, but we 're a small thing for her."

"Well, a good many small things may make up a considerable one," Nash returned. "There must always be the man; he 's the indispensable element in such a life, and he 'll be the last thing she 'll ever want for."

"What man are you talking about?" Sherringham asked, rather confusedly.

"The man of the hour, whoever he is. She 'll inspire innumerable devotions."

"Of course she will, and they will be precisely a part of the insufferable side of her life."

"Insufferable to whom?" Nash inquired. "Don't forget that the insufferable side of her life will be just the side she 'll thrive on. You can't eat your cake and have it, and you can't make omelettes without breaking eggs. You can't at once sit by the fire and fly about the world, and you can't go round and round the globe without having adventures. You can't be a great actress without quivering nerves. If you

have n't them you will only be a small one. If you have them, your friends will be pretty sure to hear of them. Your nerves and your adventures, your eggs and your cake, are part of the cost of the most expensive of professions. If you do your business at all you should do it handsomely, so that the costs may run up tremendously. You play with human passions, with exaltations and ecstasies and terrors, and if you trade on the fury of the elements you must know how to ride the storm."

"Those are the fine old commonplaces about the artistic temperament, but I usually find the artist a very meek, decent little person," said Sherringham.

"You never find the artist — you only find his work, and that 's all you need to find. When the artist 's a woman, and the woman 's an actress, meekness and decency will doubtless be there in the right proportions," Nash went on. "Miriam will represent them for you, if you give her her starting-point, with the utmost charm."

"Of course she 'll have devotions — that 's all right," said Sherringham, impatiently.

"And — don't you see? — they 'll mitigate her solitude, they 'll even enliven it," Nash remarked.

"She 'll probably box a good many ears: that 'll be lively," Peter rejoined, with some grimness.

"Oh, magnificent! it will be a merry life. Yet with its tragic passages, its distracted or its

pathetic hours," Nash continued. "In short, a little of everything."

The two men walked on without further speech, till at last Sherringham said: "The best thing for a woman in her situation is to marry some good fellow."

"Oh, I dare say she'll do that too!" Nash laughed; a remark in consequence of which Peter again lapsed into silence. Gabriel left him to enjoy his silence for some minutes; after which he added: "There's a good fellow she'd marry to-morrow."

Peter hesitated. "Do you mean her friend Dashwood?"

"No, no, I mean Nick Dormer."

"She'd marry him?" Sherringham asked.

"I mean her head's full of him. But she'll hardly get the chance."

"Does she like him so much as that?" Sherringham went on.

"I don't know quite how much you mean, but enough for all practical ends."

"Marrying a fashionable actress — that's hardly a practical end."

"Certainly not, but I'm not speaking from his point of view. Moreover, I thought you just now said it would be such a good thing for her."

"To marry Nick Dormer?"

"You said a good fellow, and he's the very best."

"I was n't thinking of the man, but of the

marriage. It would protect her, make things safe and comfortable for her and keep a lot of cads and blackguards away."

"She ought to marry the prompter or the box-keeper," said Nash. "Then it would be all right. I think indeed they generally do, don't they?"

Sherringham felt for a moment a strong disposition to drop his companion on the spot — to cross to the other side of the street and walk away without him. But there was a different impulse which struggled with this one and, after a minute, overcame it — the impulse which led to his saying presently: "Has she told you that — that she 's in love with Nick?"

"No, no — that 's not the way I know it."

"Has Nick told you, then?"

"On the contrary, I 've told him."

"You have rendered him a questionable service if you have no proof," said Peter.

"My proof is only that I 've seen her with him. She 's charming, poor thing."

"But surely she is n't in love with every man she 's charming to."

"I mean she 's charming to me," Nash replied. "I see her that way. But judge for yourself — the first time you get a chance."

"When shall I get a chance? Nick does n't come near her."

"Oh, he 'll come, he 'll come; his picture is n't finished."

"You mean *he* 'll be the box-keeper, then?"

"My dear fellow, I shall never allow it," said Gabriel Nash. "It would be idiotic and quite unnecessary. He 's beautifully arranged, in quite a different line. Fancy his taking that sort of job on his hands! Besides, she would never expect it; she 's not such a goose. They 're very good friends — it will go on that way. She 's an excellent sort of woman for him to know; she 'll give him lots of ideas of the plastic kind. He would have been up there before this, but he has been absorbed in this delightful squabble with his constituents. That, of course, is pure amusement; but when once it 's well launched he 'll get back to business, and his business will be a very different matter from Miriam's. Imagine him writing her advertisements, living on her money, adding up her profits, having rows and recriminations with her agent, carrying her shawl, spending his days in her rouge-pot. The right man for that, if she must have one, will turn up. 'Pour le mariage, non.' Miriam is n't an idiot; she really, for a woman, quite sees things as they are."

As Sherringham had not crossed the street and left Gabriel planted, he was obliged to brave the torment of this suggestive flow. But descrying, in the dusky vista of the Edgware Road, a vague and vigilant hansom, he waved his stick with eagerness and with the abrupt declaration that he was tired, must drive the rest of the way.

He offered Nash, as he entered the vehicle, no seat, but this coldness was not reflected in the lucidity with which that master of every subject went on to affirm that there was, of course, a danger, — the danger that, in given circumstances, Miriam would leave the stage.

"Leave it, you mean, for some man?"

"For the man we're talking about."

"For Nick Dormer?" Peter asked, from his place in the cab, his paleness lighted by its lamps.

"If he should make it a condition. But why should he — why should he make *any* conditions? He's not an ass, either. You see it would be a bore," Nash continued, while the hansom waited, "because if she were to do anything of that sort she would make him pay for the sacrifice."

"Oh, yes, she'd make him pay for the sacrifice," Sherringham repeated.

"And then, when he had paid, she'd go back to her footlights," Gabriel added, explicatively, from the curbstone, as Sherringham closed the apron of the cab.

"I see — she'd go back — good-night," Peter replied. "*Please* go on!" he cried to the driver through the hole in the roof. And when the vehicle rolled away, he subjoined, to himself, "Of course she would — and quite right!"

XXXVII.

"JUDGE for yourself when you get a chance," Nash had said; and as it turned out Sherringham was able to judge two days later, for he found his cousin in Balaklava Place on the Tuesday following his walk with Gabriel. He had not only stayed away from the theatre on the Monday evening (he regarded this as an achievement of some importance), but had not been near Miriam during the day. He had meant to absent himself from her company on Tuesday as well; a determination confirmed by the fact that the afternoon turned out wet. But when, at ten minutes to five o'clock, he jumped into a hansom and directed its course to St. John's Wood, it was precisely upon the weather that he shifted the responsibility of his behavior.

Miriam had dined when he reached the villa, but she was lying down — she was tired — before going to the theatre. Mrs. Rooth was, however, in the drawing-room with three gentlemen, in two of whom the fourth visitor was not startled to recognize Basil Dashwood and Gabriel Nash. Dashwood appeared to have become Miriam's brother-in-arms and a second child — a fonder one — to Mrs. Rooth; it had come to Sherring-

ham's knowledge the last time he was in Balaklava Place that the young actor had finally moved his lodgings into the quarter, making himself a near neighbor for all sorts of convenience. "Hang his convenience!" Peter thought, perceiving that Mrs. Lovick's "Arty" was now altogether one of the family. Oh, the family — it was a queer one to be connected with; that consciousness was acute in Sherringham's breast to-day as he entered Mrs. Rooth's little circle. The room was filled with cigarette-smoke and there was a messy coffee-service on the piano, whose keys Basil Dashwood lightly touched for his own diversion. Nash, addressing the room, of course, was at one end of a little sofa, with his nose in the air, and Nick Dormer was at the other end, seated much at his ease, with a certain privileged appearance of having been there often before, though Sherringham knew he had not. He looked uncritical and very young, as rosy as a school-boy on a half holiday. It was past five o'clock in the day, but Mrs. Rooth was not dressed; there was, however, no want of finish in her elegant attitude — the same relaxed grandeur (she seemed to let you understand) for which she used to be distinguished at Castle Nugent when the house was full. She toyed incongruously, in her unbuttoned wrapper, with a large tinsel fan which resembled a theatrical property.

It was one of the discomforts of Sherring-

ham's situation that many of those minor matters which are, superficially at least, most characteristic of the histrionic life had power to displease him, so that he was obliged to make the effort of indulgence. He disliked besmoked drawing-rooms and irregular meals and untidy arrangements; he could suffer from the vulgarity of Mrs. Rooth's apartments, the importunate photographs (they gave on his nerves), the barbarous absence of signs of an orderly domestic life, the odd volumes from the circulating library (you could see what they were — the very covers told you — at a glance) tumbled about with cups or glasses on them. He had not waited till now to make the reflection that it was a strange thing fate should have goaded *him* into that sort of contact; but, as he stood before Mrs. Rooth and her companions, he made it, perhaps, more pointedly than ever. Her companions, somehow, who were not responsible, did n't keep him from making it; which was particularly odd, as they were not, superficially, in the least of Bohemian type. Almost the first thing that struck him, as it happened, in coming into the room, was the essential good looks of his cousin, who was a gentleman to the eye in a different degree from the high-collared Dashwood. Peter did n't hate him for being such a pleasant young Englishman; his consciousness was traversed rather by a fresh wave of annoyance at Julia's failure to get on with him on that substantial basis.

It was Sherringham's first encounter with Nick since his arrival in London: they had been, on one side and the other, so much taken up with their own affairs. Since their last meeting Nick had, as we know, to his kinsman's perception, really taken on a new character: he had done a fine stroke of business in a quiet way. This made him a figure to be counted with, and in just the sense in which Peter desired least to count with him. Poor Sherringham, after his somersault in the blue, was much troubled these last days; he was ravaged by contending passions; he paid, every hour, in a torment of unrest, for what was false in his position, the impossibility of being consistent, the opposition of interest and desire. Nick, his junior and a lighter weight, had settled *his* problem and showed no wounds; there was something impertinent and mystifying in it. He looked too innocently young and happy there, and too careless and modest and amateurish for a rival or for the genius that he was apparently going to try to be — the genius that, the other day, in the studio with Biddy, Peter had got a startled glimpse of his capacity for being. Sherringham would have liked to feel that he had grounds of resentment, that Julia had been badly treated or that Nick was fatuous, for in that case he might have regarded him as offensive. But where was the offense of his merely being liked by a woman in respect to whom Peter had definitely denied himself the luxury of pretensions,

especially if the offender had taken no action in the matter? It could scarcely be called culpable action to call, casually, on an afternoon when the lady was invisible. Peter, at any rate, was distinctly glad Miriam was invisible; and he proposed to himself to suggest to Nick after a little that they should adjourn together — they had such interesting things to talk about. Meanwhile, Nick greeted him with candid tones and pleasant eyes, in which he could read neither confusion nor defiance. Sherringham was reassured against a danger he believed he did n't recognize and puzzled by a mystery he flattered himself he did n't mind. And he was still more ashamed of being reassured than of being puzzled.

It must be recorded that Miriam remained invisible only a few minutes longer. Nick, as Sherringham gathered, had been about a quarter of an hour in the house, which would have given the girl, aroused from her repose, about time to array herself to come down to him. At all events she was in the room, prepared, apparently, to go to the theatre, very shortly after Sherringham had become sensible of how glad he was she was out of it. Familiarity had never yet cured him of a certain tremor of expectation, and even of suspense, in regard to her entrances; a flutter caused by the simple circumstance of her infinite variety. To say she was always acting suggests too much that she was often fatiguing; for her changing face affected this particular admirer, at

least, not as a series of masks, but as a response to perceived differences, an intensity of sensibility, or still more as something cleverly constructive, like the shifting of the scene in a play or a room with many windows. Her incarnations were incalculable, but if her present denied her past and declined responsibility for her future, it made a good thing of the hour and kept the actual very actual. This time the actual was a bright, gentle, graceful, smiling young woman in a new dress, eager to go out, drawing on fresh gloves, who looked as if she were about to step into a carriage and (it was Gabriel Nash who thus formulated her physiognomy) do a lot of London things.

The young woman had time to spare, however, and she sat down and talked and laughed, and presently gave, as it seemed to Sherringham, a finer character to the tawdry little room. It was honorable enough if it belonged to her. She described herself as in a state of nervous bewilderment — exhausted, stupefied, blinded, with the rehearsals of the forthcoming piece (the first night was close at hand, and it was going to be *d'un mauvais* — they would all see!), but there was no correspondence between this account of the matter and her present kindly gayety. She sent her mother away — to "put on some clothes or something" — and, left alone with the visitors, went to a long glass between the windows, talking always to Nick Dormer, and revised and re-

arranged, a little, her own attire. She talked to Nick, over her shoulder, and to Nick only, as if he were the guest to recognize and the others did n't count. She broke out, immediately, about his having thrown up his seat, wished to know if the strange story told her by Mr. Nash were true — that he had knocked all the hopes of his party into pie.

Nick took it in this way and gave a jocular picture of his party's ruin, the critical condition of public affairs: evidently as yet he remained inaccessible to shame or repentance. Sherringham, before Miriam's entrance, had not, in shaking hands with Nick, made even a roundabout allusion to his odd "game;" there seemed a sort of muddled good taste in being silent about it. He winced a little on seeing how his scruples had been wasted, and was struck with the fine, jocose, direct turn of his kinsman's conversation with the young actress. It was a part of her unexpectedness that she took the heavy literal view of Nick's behavior; declared frankly, though without ill-nature, that she had no patience with his folly. She was horribly disappointed — she had set her heart on his being a great statesman, one of the rulers of the people and the glories of England. What was so useful, what was so noble? — how it belittled everything else! She had expected him to wear a cordon and a star some day (and to get them very soon), and to come and see her in her *loge:* it would look so well. She talked like

a lovely Philistine, except, perhaps, when she expressed surprise at hearing — she heard it from Gabriel Nash — that in England gentlemen accoutred with those emblems of their sovereign's esteem did n't so far forget themselves as to stray into the dressing-rooms of actresses. She admitted, after a moment, that they were quite right — the dressing-rooms of actresses were nasty places; but she was sorry, for that was the sort of thing she had always figured, in a corner — a distinguished man, slightly bald, in evening dress, with orders, admiring the smallness of a satin shoe and saying witty things. Gabriel Nash was convulsed with hilarity at this — such a vision of the British political hero. Coming back from the glass and making him give her his place on the sofa, she seated herself near Nick and continued to express her regret at his perversity.

"They all say that — all the charming women, but I should n't have looked for it from you," Nick replied. "I 've given you such an example of what I can do in another line."

"Do you mean my portrait? Oh, I 've got it, with your name and 'M. P.' in the corner, and that 's precisely why I 'm content. 'M. P.' in the corner of a picture is delightful, but I want to break the mould: I don't in the least insist on your giving specimens to others. And the artistic life, when you can lead another — if you have any alternative, however modest — is a very

poor business. It comes last, in dignity — after everything else. Ain't I up to my eyes in it, and don't I know?"

"You talk like my broken-hearted mother," said Nick.

"Does she hate it so intensely?"

"She has the darkest ideas about it — the wildest theories. I can't imagine where she gets them; partly, I think, from a general conviction that the 'æsthetic' — a horrible insidious foreign disease — is eating the healthy core out of English life (dear old English life!), and partly from the charming drawings in 'Punch' and the clever satirical articles, pointing at mysterious depths of contamination, in the other weekly papers. She believes there 's a dreadful coterie of uncannily clever and desperately refined people, who wear a kind of loose, faded uniform and worship only beauty — which is a fearful thing — that Nash has introduced me to it, that I now spend all my time in it, and that, for its sweet sake, I have repudiated the most sacred engagements. Poor Nash, who, so far as I can make out, is n't in any sort of society, however bad!"

"But I 'm uncannily clever," Nash interposed, "and though I can't afford the uniform (I believe you get it best somewhere in South Audley Street), I do worship beauty. I really think it 's I the weekly papers mean."

"Oh, I 've read the articles — I know the sort!" said Basil Dashwood.

Miriam looked at him. "Go and see if the brougham 's there — I ordered it early."

Dashwood, without moving, consulted his watch. "It is n't time yet — I know more about the brougham than you. I 've made a rattling good arrangement for her — it really costs her nothing," the young actor continued confidentially to Sherringham, near whom he had placed himself.

"Your mother 's quite right to be broken-hearted," Miriam declared, "and I can imagine exactly what she has been through. I should like to talk with her — I should like to see her." Nick broke into ringing laughter, reminding her that she had talked to him, while she sat for her portrait, in directly the opposite sense, most suggestively and inspiringly; and Nash explained that she was studying the part of a political duchess and wished to take observations for it, to work herself into the character. Miriam might in fact have been a political duchess, as she sat with her head erect and her gloved hands folded, smiling with aristocratic dimness at Nick. She shook her head with stately sadness; she might have been representing Mary Stuart in Schiller's play. "I 've changed since that. I want you to be the grandest thing there is — the counselor of kings."

Peter Sherringham wondered if possibly it were not since she had met his sister in Nick's studio that she had changed, if perhaps it had not oc-

curred to her that it would give Julia the sense of being more effectually routed to know that the woman who had thrown the bomb was one who also tried to keep Nick in the straight path. This indeed would involve an assumption that Julia might know, whereas it was perfectly possible that she might n't and more than possible that if she should she would n't care. Miriam's essential fondness for trying different ways was always there as an adequate reason for any particular way; a truth which, however, sometimes only half prevented the particular way from being vexatious to Sherringham.

"Yet, after all, who is more æsthetic than you, and who goes in more for the beautiful?" Nick asked. "You 're never so beautiful as when you pitch into it."

"Oh, I 'm an inferior creature, of an inferior sex, and I have to earn my bread as I can. I 'd give it all up in a moment, my odious trade — for an inducement."

"And pray what do you mean by an inducement?" Nick demanded.

"My dear fellow, she means you — if you 'll give her a permanent engagement to sit for you!" exclaimed Gabriel Nash. "What singularly crude questions you ask!"

"I like the way she talks," Basil Dashwood broke in, "when I gave up the most brilliant prospects, of very much the same kind as Mr. Dormer's, expressly to go on the stage."

"You 're an inferior creature too," said Miriam.

"Miss Rooth is very hard to satisfy," Sherringham observed. "A man of distinction, slightly bald, in evening dress, with orders, in the corner of her *loge* — she has such a personage ready made to her hand, and she does n't so much as look at him. Am I not an inducement? Have I not offered you a permanent engagement?"

"Your orders — where are your orders?" Miriam inquired, with a sweet smile, getting up.

"I shall be a minister next year, and an ambassador before you know it. Then I shall stick on everything that can be had."

"And they call *us* mountebanks!" cried the girl. "I 've been so glad to see you again — do you want another sitting?" she went on, to Nick, as if to take leave of him.

"As many as you 'll give me — I shall be grateful for all," Nick answered. "I should like to do you as you are at present. You 're totally different from the woman I painted — you 're wonderful."

"The Comic Muse!" laughed Miriam. "Well, you must wait till our first nights are over — I 'm *sur les dents* till then. There 's everything to do, and I have to do it all. That fellow 's good for nothing — for nothing but domestic life," and she glanced at Basil Dashwood. "He has n't an idea — not one that you 'd willingly tell of him, though he 's rather useful for the stables.

We 've got stables now — or we try to look as if we had: Dashwood's ideas are *de cette force.* In ten days I shall have more time."

"The Comic Muse? Never, never," Sherringham protested. "You are not to go smirking through the age and down to posterity — I 'd rather see you as Medusa crowned with serpents. That 's what you look like when you look best."

"That 's consoling — when I 've just bought a new bonnet! I forgot to tell you just now that when you are an ambassador you may propose anything you like," Miriam went on. "But excuse me if I make that condition. Seriously speaking, come to me glittering with orders and I shall probably succumb. I can't resist stars and garters. Only you must, as you say, have them all. I *don't* like to hear Mr. Dormer talk the slang of the studio — like that phrase just now: it *is* a fall to a lower state. However, when one is low one must crawl, and I 'm crawling down to the Strand. Dashwood, see if mamma 's ready. If she is n't, I decline to wait; you must bring her in a hansom. I 'll take Mr. Dormer in the brougham; I want to talk with Mr. Dormer; he must drive with me to the theatre. His situation is full of interest." Miriam led the way out of the room as she continued to chatter, and when she reached the house-door, with the four men in her train, the carriage had just drawn up at the garden-gate. It appeared that Mrs. Rooth was not ready, and the girl, in spite of a

remonstrance from Nick, who had the sense of usurping the old lady's place, repeated her injunction that she should be brought on in a cab. Miriam's companions accompanied her to the gate, and she insisted upon Nick's taking his seat in the brougham and taking it first. Before she entered she put out her hand to Sherringham, and, looking up at him, held his own kindly. "Dear old master, are n't you coming to-night? I miss you when you are not there."

"Don't go — don't go — it 's too much," Nash interposed.

"She *is* wonderful," said Basil Dashwood, regarding her admiringly; "she *has* gone into the rehearsals, tooth and nail. But nothing takes it out of her."

"Nothing puts it into you, my dear!" Miriam returned. Then she went on, to Sherringham: "You 're the faithful one — you 're the one I count on." He was not looking at her; his eyes traveled into the carriage, where they rested on Nick Dormer, established on the further seat with his face turned toward the further window. He was the one, faithful or no, counted on or no, whom a charming woman had preferred to carry off, and there was a certain triumph for him in that fact; but it pleased Sherringham to imagine that his attitude was a little foolish. Miriam discovered something of this sort in Sherringham's eyes; for she exclaimed abruptly: "Don't kill him — he does n't care for me!" With

this she passed into the carriage, which rolled away.

Sherringham stood watching it a moment, till he heard Basil Dashwood again beside him. "You would n't believe what I make him do it for — a little fellow I know."

"Good-by; take good care of Mrs. Rooth," said Gabriel Nash, waving a cheerful farewell to the young actor. He gave a smiling survey of the heavens and remarked to Sherringham that the rain had stopped. Was he walking, was he driving, should they be going in the same direction? Sherringham cared little about his direction and had little account of it to give; he simply moved away in silence, with Gabriel at his side. Gabriel was partly an affliction to him; indeed, the fact that he had assumed a baleful fascination made him only a deeper affliction. Sherringham moreover did him the justice to observe that he could hold his peace occasionally: he had, for instance, this afternoon, taken little part in the conversation in Balaklava Place. Peter greatly disliked to talk to him of Miriam, but he liked Nash to talk of her, and he even liked him to say such things as he might contradict. He was not, however, moved to contradict an assertion dropped by his companion, disconnectedly, at the end of a few minutes, to the effect that she was after all the most good-natured creature alive. All the same, Nash added, it would n't do for her to take possession of an

organization like Nick's; and he repeated that, for his part, he would never allow it. It would be on his conscience to interfere. To which Sherringham replied, disingenuously, that they might all do as they liked — it did n't matter a button to *him*. And with an effort to carry off that comedy, he changed the subject.

XXXVIII.

PETER SHERRINGHAM would not for a moment have admitted that he was jealous of Nick Dormer, but he would almost have liked to be accused of it; for this would have given him an opportunity to declare, with plausibility, that so uncomfortable a passion had no application to his case. How could a man be jealous when he was not a suitor? how could he pretend to guard a property which was neither his own nor destined to become his own? There could be no question of loss when one had nothing at stake, and no question of envy when the responsibility of possession was exactly what one prayed to be delivered from. The measure of one's susceptibility was one's pretensions, and Peter was not only ready to declare over and over again that, thank God, he had none: his spiritual detachment was still more complete — he literally suffered from the fact that the declaration was but little elicited. He connected an idea of virtue and honor with his attitude; for surely it was a high example of conduct to have quenched a personal passion for the sake of the public service. He had gone over the whole question at odd, irrepressible hours; he had returned, spiritually speaking, the buffet

administered to him, in a moment, that day in Rosedale Road, by the spectacle of the *crânerie* with which Nick could let worldly glories slide. Resolution for resolution, he preferred after all another sort, and his own *crânerie* would be shown in the way he should stick to his profession and stand up for British interests. If Nick had leaped over a wall he would leap over a river. The course of his river was already traced and his loins were already girded. Thus he was justified in holding that the measure of a man's susceptibility was a man's attitude: that was the only thing he was bound to give an account of.

He was perpetually giving an account of it to his own soul, in default of other listeners. He was quite angry at having tasted a sweetness in Miriam's assurance, at the carriage door, bestowed indeed with very little solemnity, that Nick did n't care for her. Wherein did it concern him that Nick cared for her or that Nick did n't? Wherein did it signify to him that Gabriel Nash should have taken upon himself to disapprove of a union between the young actress and the young painter and to frustrate an accident that might perhaps be happy? For those had also been cooling words, at the hour, though Peter blushed on the morrow to think that he had perceived in them anything but Nash's personal sublimity. He was ashamed of having been refreshed, and refreshed by so sickly a draught, because it was his theory that he was not in a fever. As for

keeping an eye on Nick, it would soon become clear to that young man and that young man's charming friend that he had quite other uses for his sharpness. Nick and Miriam and Gabriel Nash could straighten out their complications according to their light. He would never speak to Nick of Miriam; he felt, indeed, just now as if he should never speak to Nick of anything. He had traced the course of his river, as I say, and the real proof would be the way he should fly through the air. It was a case for action — for vigorous, unmistakable action. He had done very little since his arrival in London but moon round a *fille de théâtre* who was taken up partly, though she bluffed it off, with another man, and partly with arranging new petticoats for a beastly old "poetic drama;" but this little waste of time should instantly be made up. He had given himself a certain rope, and he had danced to the end of his rope, and now he would dance back. That was all right — so right that Sherringham could only express to himself how right it was by whistling gayly.

He whistled as he went to dine with a great personage, the day after his meeting with Nick in Balaklava Place; a great personage to whom he had originally paid his respects — it was high time — the day before that meeting, the previous Monday. The sense of omissions to repair, of a superior line to take, perhaps made him study with more intensity to please the personage, who

gave him ten minutes and asked him five questions. A great many doors were successively opened before any palpitating pilgrim who was about to enter the presence of this distinguished man; but they were discreetly closed again behind Sherringham, and I must ask the reader to pause with me at the nearer end of the momentary vista. This particular pilgrim fortunately felt that he could count upon being recognized not only as a faithful if obscure official in the great hierarchy, but as a clever young man who happened to be connected by blood with people his lordship had intimately known. No doubt it was simply as the clever young man that Peter received the next morning, from the dispenser of his lordship's hospitality, a note asking him to dine on the morrow. He had received such cards before, and he always responded to the invitation: he did so, however, on the present occasion, with a sense of unusual intention. In due course his intention was translated into words: before the gentlemen left the dining-room he took the liberty of asking his noble host if during the next few days there would be three minutes more that he might, in his extreme benevolence, bestow upon him.

"What is it you want? Tell me now," the master of his fate replied, motioning to the rest of the company to pass out and detaining Peter in the dining-room.

Peter's excellent training covered every con-

tingency: he could be concise or diffuse, as the occasion required. Even he himself, however, was surprised at the quick felicity of the terms in which he was conscious of conveying that if it were compatible with higher conveniences he should peculiarly like to be transferred to duties in a more distant quarter of the globe. Indeed, though Sherringham was fond of thinking of himself as a man of emotions controlled by training, it is not impossible that there was a greater candor than he knew in the expression of his face and even the slight tremor of his voice as he presented this petition. He had wished extremely that his manner should be good in doing so, but perhaps the best part of it, for his interlocutor, was just the part in which it failed — in which it confessed a secret that the highest diplomacy would not have confessed. Sherringham remarked to the minister that he did n't care in the least where the place might be, nor how little coveted a post; the further away the better and the climate did n't matter. He would only prefer, of course, that there should be really something to do, although he would make the best of it even if there were not. He stopped in time, or at least he thought he did, not to appear to suggest that he covertly sought relief from the misery of a hindered passion in a flight to latitudes unfavorable to human life. His august patron gave him a sharp look which, for a moment, seemed the precursor of a sharper question; but the

moment elapsed and the question did not come. This considerate omission, characteristic of a true man of the world and representing quick guesses and still quicker indifferences, made Sherringham from that moment his lordship's ardent partisan. What did come was a good-natured laugh and the exclamation: "You know there are plenty of swamps and jungles, if you want that sort of thing." Sherringham replied that it was very much that sort of thing he did want; whereupon his interlocutor continued, "I 'll see — I 'll see: if anything turns up, you shall hear."

Something turned up the very next day: our young man, taken at his word, found himself indebted to the post for a large, stiff, engraved official letter, in which the high position of minister to the smallest of Central American republics was offered to him. The republic, though small, was big enough to be "shaky," and the position, though high, was not so exalted that there were not much greater altitudes above it to which it was a stepping-stone. Sherringham took one thing with another, rejoiced at his easy triumph, reflected that he must have been even more noticed at headquarters than he had hoped, and, on the spot, consulting nobody and waiting for nothing, signified his unqualified acceptance of the place. Nobody with a grain of sense would have advised him to do anything else. It made him happier than he had supposed he should ever be

again; it made him feel professionally in the train, as they said in Paris; it was serious, it was interesting, it was exciting, and Sherringham's imagination, letting itself loose into the future, began once more to scale the crowning heights. It was very simple to hold one's course if one really tried, and he blessed the shakiness of nations. A further communication informed him that he would be expected to return to Paris, for a short interval, a week later, and that he would before that time be advised of the date at which he was to proceed to his remoter duties.

XXXIX.

THE first thing Peter now did was to go and see Lady Agnes Dormer; it is not unworthy of note that he took, on the other hand, no step to make his promotion known to Miriam Rooth. To render it more probable he should find her he went at the luncheon-hour; and she was indeed on the point of sitting down to that repast with Grace. Biddy was not at home — Biddy was never at home now, her mother said: she was always at Nick's place, she spent her life there, she ate and drank there, she almost slept there. What she found to do there, in so many hours, or what was the irresistible spell, Lady Agnes could not pretend that she had succeeded in discovering. She spoke of this baleful resort only as "Nick's place," and she spoke of it at first as little as possible. She thought it very probable, however, that Biddy would come in early that afternoon: there was something or other, some common social duty, that she had condescended to promise she would perform with Grace. Poor Lady Agnes, whom Sherringham found in a very grim yet very tremulous condition (she assured her visitor her nerves were all gone), almost abused her younger daughter for two minutes,

having evidently a deep-seated need of abusing some one. I must add, however, that she did n't wait to meet Grace's eye before recovering, by a rapid gyration, her view of the possibilities of things — those possibilities from which she still might squeeze, as a mother, the drop that would sweeten her cup. "Dear child," she had the presence of mind to add, "her only fault is, after all, that she adores her brother. She has a capacity for adoration, and must always take her gospel from some one."

Grace declared to Peter that her sister would have stayed at home if she had dreamed he was coming, and Lady Agnes let him know that she had heard all about the hour he had spent with the poor child at Nick's place, and about his extraordinary good-nature in taking the two girls to the play. Peter lunched in Calcutta Gardens, spending an hour there which proved at first unexpectedly and, as it seemed to him, unfairly dismal. He knew from his own general perceptions, from what Biddy had told him and from what he had heard Nick say in Balaklava Place, that Lady Agnes would have been wounded by her son's apostasy; but it was not till he saw her that he appreciated the dark difference this young man's behavior had made in the outlook of his family. Evidently that behavior had, as he phrased it, pulled the bottom out of innumerable private calculations. These were things that no outsider could measure, and they were none of an out-

sider's business; it was enough that Lady Agnes struck him really as a woman who had received her death-blow. She looked ten years older; she was white and haggard and tragic. Her eyes burned with a strange intermittent fire which made him say to himself that her children had better look out for her. When they were not filled with this unnatural flame they were suffused with comfortless tears; and altogether the afflicted lady was very bad — very bad indeed. It was because he had known she would be very bad that he had, in his kindness, called upon her in exactly this manner; but he recognized that to undertake to be kind to her in proportion to her need might carry one very far. He was glad he himself had not a wronged, mad mother, and he wondered how Nick Dormer could endure the home he had ruined. Apparently he did n't endure it very much, but had taken definitive and highly convenient refuge in Rosedale Road.

Peter's judgment of his young kinsman was considerably confused, and a sensible element in it was the consciousness that he was perhaps just now not in the best state of mind for judging him at all. At the same time, though he held in general that an intelligent man has a legible warrant for doing the particular thing he prefers, he could scarcely help asking himself whether, in the exercise of a virile freedom, it had been absolutely indispensable that Nick should work such domestic woe. He admitted indeed that

this was an anomalous vision of Nick, as the worker of domestic woe. Then he saw that Lady Agnes's grievance (there came a moment, later, when she asserted as much) was not quite what Nick, in Balaklava Place, had represented it — with questionable taste perhaps — to a mocking actress; was not a mere shocked quarrel with his adoption of a "low" career, or a horror, the old-fashioned horror, of the strange licenses taken by artists under pretext of being conscientious: the day for this was past, and English society thought the brush and the fiddle as good as anything else, with two or three exceptions. It was not what he had taken up, but what he had put down, that made the sorry difference, and the tragedy would have been equally great if he had become a wine-merchant or a horse-dealer. Peter had gathered at first that Lady Agnes would not trust herself to speak directly of her trouble, and he obeyed what he supposed to be the best discretion in making no allusion to it. But a few minutes before they rose from luncheon she broke out, and when he attempted to utter a word of mitigation there was something that went to his heart in the way she returned: "Oh, you don't know — you don't know!"

He perceived Grace's eyes fixed upon him at this instant with a look of supplication, and he was uncertain as to what she wanted — that he should say something more to console her mother or should hurry away from the subject. Grace

looked old and plain and (he had thought, on coming in) rather cross, but she evidently wanted something. "You don't know," Lady Agnes repeated, with a trembling voice — "you don't know." She had pushed her chair a little away from the table; she held her pocket-handkerchief pressed hard to her mouth, almost stuffed into it, and her eyes were fixed on the floor. She made him feel as if he did know — knew what towering piles of confidence and hope had been dashed to the earth. Then Lady Agnes finished her sentence, unexpectedly: "You don't know what my life with my husband was." Here, on the other hand, Peter was slightly at fault — he did n't exactly see what her life with her husband had to do with it. What was clear to him, however, was that they literally had looked for the very greatest things from Nick. It was not quite easy to see why this had been the case — it had not been precisely Sherringham's own prefigurement. Nick appeared to have had the faculty of communicating that sort of faith to women; he had originally given Julia a tremendous dose of it, though she had since shaken off the effects.

"Do you really think he would have done such great things, politically speaking?" Peter inquired. "Do you consider that the root of the matter was in him?"

Lady Agnes hesitated a moment, looking rather hard at her visitor. "I only think what all his friends — all his father's friends — have

thought. He was his father's son, after all. No young man ever had a finer training, and he gave, from the first, repeated proof of having the highest sort of ability, the highest sort of ambition. See how he got in, everywhere. Look at his first seat — look at his second," Lady Agnes continued. "Look at what every one says at this moment."

"Look at all the papers!" said Grace. "Did you ever hear him speak?" she asked. And when Peter reminded her that he had spent his life in foreign lands she went on: "Well, you lost something."

"It was very charming," said Lady Agnes quietly.

"Of course he is charming, whatever he does," Peter rejoined. "He 'll be a charming artist."

"Oh, heaven!" groaned Lady Agnes, rising quickly.

"He won't — that 's the worst," Grace amended. "It is n't as if he 'd do things people would like. I've been to his place, and I never saw such a horrid lot of things — not at all clever or pretty."

"You know nothing whatever about the matter!" Lady Agnes exclaimed, with unexpected asperity. Then she added, to Peter, that, as it happened, her children did have a good deal of artistic taste: Grace was the only one who was totally deficient in it. Biddy was very clever — Biddy really might learn to do pretty things. And anything the poor child could learn was now

no more than her duty — there was so little knowing what the future had in store for them all.

"You think too much of the future — you take terribly gloomy views," said Peter, looking for his hat.

"What other views can one take, when one's son has deliberately thrown away a fortune?"

"Thrown one away? Do you mean through not marrying — ?"

"I mean through killing by his perversity the best friend he ever had."

Sherringham stared a moment; then, with laughter: "Ah, but Julia is n't dead of it!"

"I 'm not talking of Julia," said Lady Agnes, with a good deal of majesty. "Nick is n't mercenary, and I 'm not complaining of that."

"She means Mr. Carteret," Grace explained. "He would have done anything if Nick had stayed in the House."

"But he 's not dead?"

"Charles Carteret is dying," said Lady Agnes — "his end is very, very near. He has been a sort of providence to us — he was Sir Nicholas's second self. But he won't stand such nonsense, and that chapter 's closed."

"You mean he has dropped Nick out of his will?"

"Cut him off utterly. He has given him notice."

"The old scoundrel! But Nick will work the better for that — he 'll depend on himself."

"Yes, and whom shall *we* depend on?" Grace demanded.

"Don't be vulgar, for God's sake!" her mother ejaculated, with a certain inconsequence.

"Oh, leave Nick alone — he'll make a lot of money," Peter declared cheerfully, following his two companions into the hall.

"I don't in the least care whether he does or not," said Lady Agnes. "You must come upstairs again — I've lots to say to you yet," she went on, seeing that Peter had taken his hat. "You must arrange to come and dine with us immediately; it's only because I've been so steeped in misery that I didn't write to you the other day — directly after you called. We don't give parties, as you may imagine, but if you'll come just as we are, for old acquaintance' sake —"

"Just with Nick — if Nick will come — and dear Biddy," Grace interposed.

"Nick must certainly come, as well as dear Biddy, whom I hoped so much to find," Peter rejoined. "Because I'm going away — I don't know when I shall see them again."

"Wait with mamma. Biddy will come in, now, at any moment," Grace urged.

"You're going away?" asked Lady Agnes, pausing at the foot of the stairs and turning her white face upon him. Something in the tone of her voice showed that she had been struck by his own tone.

"I have had promotion, and you must congrat-

ulate me. They are sending me out as minister to a little hot hole in Central America — five thousand miles away. I shall have to go rather soon."

"Oh, I 'm so glad!" Lady Agnes breathed. Still she paused, at the foot of the stair, and still she gazed.

"How very delightful, because it will lead, straight off, to all sorts of other good things!" Grace exclaimed.

"Oh, I 'm crawling up, and I 'm an excellency," Peter laughed.

"Then if you dine with us your excellency must have great people to meet you."

"Nick and Biddy — they 're great enough."

"Come up-stairs — come up-stairs," said Lady Agnes, turning quickly and beginning to ascend.

"Wait for Biddy — I 'm going out," Grace continued, extending her hand to her kinsman. "I shall see you again — not that you care; but good-by now. Wait for Biddy," the girl repeated in a lower tone, fastening her eyes on his with the same urgent, mystifying gleam that he thought he had perceived in them at luncheon.

"Oh, I 'll go and see her in Rosedale Road," he answered.

"Do you mean to-day — now?"

"I don't know about to-day, but before I leave England."

"Well, she 'll be in immediately," said Grace. "Good-by to your excellency."

"Come up, Peter — *please* come up," called Lady Agnes, from the top of the stairs.

He mounted, and when he found himself in the drawing-room with her, with the door closed, she told him that she was exceedingly interested in his fine prospects, that she wished to hear all about his new position. She rang for coffee and indicated the seat he would find most comfortable: he had for a moment an apprehension that she would tell him he might if he liked light a cigar. For Peter Sherringham had suddenly become restless — too restless to occupy a comfortable chair; he seated himself in it only to jump up again, and he went to the window — while he communicated to his hostess the very little that he knew about his prospective post — on hearing a vehicle drive up to the door. A strong light had just been thrown into his mind, and it seemed to grow stronger when, looking out of the window, he saw Grace Dormer issue from the house in a bonnet and jacket which had all the air of having been assumed with extraordinary speed. Her jacket was unbuttoned, her gloves were dangling from her hand and she was tying her bonnet-strings. The vehicle into which she hastily sprang was a hansom-cab which had been summoned by the butler from the doorstep, and which rolled away with her after she had given the cabman an address.

"Where is Grace going in such a hurry?" he asked of Lady Agnes; to which she replied that

she had not the least idea — her children, at the pass they had all come to, knocked about as they liked.

Peter sat down again; he stayed a quarter of an hour and then he stayed longer, and during this time his appreciation of what Lady Agnes had in her mind gathered force. She showed him clearly enough what she had in her mind, although she showed it by no clumsy nor reprehensible overtures. It looked out of her sombre, conscious eyes and quavered in her preoccupied, perfunctory tones. She manifested an extravagant interest in his future proceedings, the probable succession of events in his career, the different honors he would be likely to come in for, the salary attached to his actual appointment, the salary attached to the appointments that would follow — they would be sure to, would n't they? — and what he might reasonably expect to save. Oh, he must save — Lady Agnes was an advocate of saving; and he must take tremendous pains and get on and be clever and ambitious: he must make himself indispensable and rise to the top. She was urgent and suggestive and sympathetic; she threw herself into the vision of his achievements and emoluments as if to satisfy a little the sore hunger with which Nick's treachery had left her. This was touching to Peter Sherringham, and he did not remain unmoved even at those more importunate moments when, as she fell into silence, fidgeting feverishly with

a morsel of fancy-work that she had plucked from a table, her whole presence became an intense repressed appeal to him. What that appeal would have been had it been uttered was: "Oh, Peter, take little Biddy; oh, my dear young friend, understand your interests at the same time that you understand mine; be kind and reasonable and clever; save me all further anxiety and tribulation and accept my lovely, faultless child from my hands."

That was what Lady Agnes had always meant, more or less, that was what Grace had meant, and they meant it with singular lucidity on the present occasion. Lady Agnes meant it so much that from one moment to another Peter scarcely knew what she might do; and Grace meant it so much that she had rushed away in a hansom to fetch her sister from the studio. Grace, however, was a fool, for Biddy certainly would n't come. The news of his promotion had set them off, adding brightness to their idea of his being an excellent match; bringing home to them sharply the sense that if he were going away to strange countries he must take Biddy with him — that something at all events must be settled about Biddy before he went. They had suddenly begun to throb with the conviction that they had no time to lose.

Strangely enough, the perception of all this had not the effect of throwing Peter on the defensive, or at least of making him wish to bolt

When once he had discovered what was in the air he recognized a propriety, a real felicity in it; could not deny that he was, in certain ways, a good match, since it was quite probable he would go far; and was even generous enough (as he had no fear of being dragged to the altar) to enter into the conception that he might offer some balm to a mother who had had a horrid disappointment. The feasibility of marrying Biddy was not exactly augmented by the idea that his doing so would be a great offset to what Nick had made Lady Agnes suffer; but at any rate Peter did not dislike his strenuous companion so much as to wish to punish her for being strenuous. He was not afraid of her, whatever she might do; and though he was unable to grasp the practical relevancy of Biddy's being produced on the instant, he was willing to linger for half an hour on the chance of her turning up.

There was a certain contagion in Lady Agnes's appeal — it made him appeal sensibly to himself. For, indeed, as it is time to say, the glass of our young man's spirit had been polished for that reflection. It was only at this moment that he became really candid with himself. When he made up his mind that his only safety was in flight, and took the strong measure of asking for assistance to flee, he was very conscious that another and probably still more effectual safeguard (especially if the two should be conjoined) lay in the hollow of his hand. Julia Dallow's words in Paris had

come back to him and had seemed much wiser than when they were spoken: "She'll save you disappointments; you would know the worst that can happen to you, and it would n't be bad." Julia had put it into a nutshell — Biddy would probably save him disappointments. And then she was — well, she was Biddy. Peter knew better what that was since the hour he had spent with her in Rosedale Road. But he had brushed away the sense of it, though he was aware that in doing so he took only half measures, was even guilty of a sort of fraud upon himself. If he was sincere in wishing to put a gulf between his future and that portion of his past and present which was associated with Miriam Rooth, there was a very simple way to do so. He had dodged that way, dishonestly fixing upon another which, taken alone, was far from being so good; but Lady Agnes brought him back to it. She held him in magnanimous contemplation of it, during which the safety, as Julia had called it, of the remedy became fascinating to his mind, especially as that safety appeared not to exclude a concomitant sweetness. It would be simple and it would swallow up his problems; it would put an end to all alternatives, which, as alternatives were otherwise putting an end to him, would be an excellent thing. It would settle the whole question of his future, and it was high time this should be settled.

Peter took two cups of coffee while he made

out his future with Lady Agnes, but though he drank them slowly he had finished them before Biddy turned up. He stayed three quarters of an hour, saying to himself that she would n't come — why should she come? Lady Agnes said nothing about this; she really, in vulgar vocables, said nothing about any part of the business. But she made him fix the next day but one for coming to dinner, and her repeated declaration that there would be no one else, not another creature but themselves, had almost the force of a legal paper. In giving his word that he would come without fail, and not write the next day to throw them over for some function that he should choose to dub obligatory, Peter felt quite as if he were putting his name to such a document. He went away at half past three; Biddy, of course, had n't come, and he had been certain she would n't. He could n't imagine what Grace's idea had been, nor what pretext she had put forward to her sister. Whatever it had been, Biddy had seen through it and hated such machinations. Peter could only like her the better for that.

XL.

LADY AGNES would doubtless have done better, in her own interest or in that of her child, to have made sure of Peter's company for the very next evening. This she had indeed attempted, but the application of the idea had failed. Peter had a theory that he was inextricably engaged; moreover her ladyship could not take upon herself to answer for Nick. Of course they must have Nick, though, to tell the truth, the hideous truth, she and her son were scarcely upon terms. Peter insisted on Nick, he wished particularly to see him, and he gave his hostess notice that he would make each of them forgive everything to the other. Lady Agnes declared that all her son had to forgive was her loving him more than her life, and she would have challenged Peter, had he allowed it, on the general ground of the comparative dignity of the two arts of painting portraits and governing nations. Peter declined the challenge: the most he did was to intimate that he perhaps saw Nick more vividly as a painter than as a governor. Later he remembered vaguely something Lady Agnes had said about their being a governing family.

He was going, by what he could ascertain, to

a very queer climate, and he had many preparations to make. He gave his best attention to these, and for a couple of hours after leaving Lady Agnes he rummaged London for books from which he might extract information about his new habitat. It made apparently no great figure in literature, so that Peter could reflect that he was perhaps destined to find a salutary distraction in filling the void with a volume of impressions. After he had gathered that there were no books he went into the Park. He treated himself to an afternoon or two there when he happened to drop upon London in the summer: it refreshed his sense of the British interests he would have to stand up for. Moreover, he had been hiding more or less, and now all that was changed, and this was the simplest way not to hide. He met a host of friends, made his situation as public as possible and accepted on the spot a great many invitations; all subject, however, to the mental reservation that he should allow none of them to interfere with his being present the first night of Miriam's new venture. He was going to the equator to get away from her, but to break with the past with some decency of form he must show an affected interest, if he could muster none other, in an occasion that meant so much for her. The least intimate of her associates would do that, and Peter remembered that, at the expense of good manners, he had stayed away from her first appearance on any

stage. He would have been shocked if he had found himself obliged to go back to Paris without giving her his personal countenance at the imminent crisis, so good a right had she to expect it.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he went to Great Stanhope Street to dress for dinner and learn that a note which he found on the hall table, and which bore the marks of hasty dispatch, had come in three or four hours before. It exhibited the signature of Miriam Rooth and informed him that she positively expected him at the theatre at eleven o'clock the next morning, for which hour a dress rehearsal of the revived play had been hurriedly determined upon, the first night being now definitely fixed for the impending Saturday. She counted upon his attendance at both ceremonies, but she had particular reasons for wishing to see him at the rehearsal. "I want you to see and judge and tell me," she said, "for my mind 's like a flogged horse — it won't give another kick." It was for the Saturday he had made Lady Agnes his promise; he had thought of the possibility of the play in doing so, but had rested in the faith that, from valid symptoms, this complication would not occur till the following week. He decided nothing on the spot in relation to the conflict — it was enough to dash off three words to Miriam to the effect that he would sooner perish than fail her on the morrow.

He went to the theatre in the morning, and the episode proved curious and instructive. Though there were twenty people in the stalls, it bore little resemblance to those *répétitions générales* to which, in Paris, his love of the drama had often attracted him, and which, taking place at night, in the theatre closed to the public, are virtually first performances with invited spectators. They were, to his sense, always settled and stately, and were rehearsals of the *première* even more than rehearsals of the play. The present occasion was less august; it was not so much a concert as a confusion of sounds, and it took audible and at times disputatious counsel with itself. It was rough and frank and spasmodic, but it was vivid and strong, and, in spite of the serious character of the piece, often exceedingly droll: while it gave Sherringham, oddly enough, a livelier sense than he had ever had of bending over the hissing, smoking, sputtering caldron in which a palatable performance is stewed. He looked into the gross darkness that may result from excess of light; that is he understood how knocked up, on the eve of production, every one concerned in the preparation of a play might be, with nerves overstretched and glasses blurred, awaiting the test and the response, the echo to be given back by the big, receptive, artless, stupid, delightful public. Sherringham's interest had been great in advance, and as Miriam, since his arrival, had taken him much into her confidence, he knew

what she intended to do and had discussed a hundred points with her. They had differed about some of them and she had always said: "Ah, but wait till you see how I shall do it at the time!" That was usually her principal reason and her most convincing argument. She had made some changes at the last hour — she was going to do several things in another way. But she wanted a touching-stone, she wanted a fresh ear, and, as she told Sherringham when he went behind after the first act, that was why she had insisted on this private performance, to which a few fresh ears were to be admitted. They did n't want to let her have it — they were a parcel of donkeys; but as to what she meant in general to have, she had given them a hint which she flattered herself they would n't soon forget.

Miriam spoke as if she had had a great battle with her fellow-workers and had routed them utterly. It was not the first time Sherringham had heard her talk as if such a life as hers could only be a fighting life, so that she frankly recognized the fine uses of a faculty for making a row. She rejoiced that she had this faculty, for she knew what to do with it; and though there might be a certain swagger in taking such a stand in advance, when one had done the infinitely little that she had done, yet she trusted to the future to show how right she should have been in believing that a pack of idiots would never hold out

against her, would know that they could n't afford to. Her assumption, of course, was that she fought for the light and the right, for the good way and the thorough, for doing a thing properly if one did it at all. What she had really wanted was the theatre closed for a night, and the dress rehearsal, put on for a few people, given instead of "Yolande." That she had not got, but she would have it the next time. She spoke as if her triumphs behind the scenes as well as before would go by leaps and bounds, and Sherringham perfectly believed, for the time, that she would drive her coadjutors in front of her like sheep. Her tone was the sort of thing that would have struck one as preposterous if one did n't believe in her; but if one did believe in her it only seemed thrown in with the other gifts. How was she going to act that night, and what could be said for such a hateful way of doing things? She asked Sherringham questions that he was quite unable to answer; she abounded in superlatives and tremendously strong objections. He had a sharper vision than usual of the queer fate, for a peaceable man, of being involved in a life of so violent a rhythm: one might as well be hooked to a Catharine-wheel and whiz round in flame and smoke.

It was only for five minutes, in the wing, amid jostling and shuffling and shoving, that they held this conference. Miriam, splendid in a brocaded anachronism, a false dress of the beginning of

the century, and excited and appealing, imperious and reckless and good-natured, full of exaggerated propositions, supreme determinations and comical irrelevancies, showed as radiant a young head as the stage had ever seen. Other people quickly surrounded her, and Sherringham saw that though she wanted a fresh ear and a fresh eye she was liable to tell those who possessed these advantages that they did n't know what they were talking about. It was rather hard with her (Basil Dashwood let him into this, wonderfully painted and in a dress even more beautiful than Miriam's — that of a young dandy of the ages of silk): if you were not in the business you were one kind of donkey and if you *were* in the business you were another kind. Sherringham noted with a certain displeasure that Gabriel Nash was not there; he preferred to believe that it was from this observation that his annoyance happened to come when Miriam, after the remark just quoted from Dashwood, laughing and saying that at any rate the thing would do because it would just have to do, thrust vindictively but familiarly into the young actor's face a magnificent feather fan. "Is n't he too lovely," she asked, "and does n't he know how to do it?" Basil Dashwood had the sense of costume even more than Sherringham supposed, inasmuch as it now appeared that he had gone profoundly into the question of what his clever comrade was to wear. He had drawn patterns and hunted up

stuffs, had helped her to try on her clothes, had bristled with ideas and pins. It is not perfectly easy to explain why Sherringham grudged Gabriel Nash the cynicism of his absence; it may even be thought singular that he should have missed him. At any rate he flushed a little when Miriam, of whom he inquired whether she had n't invited her oldest and dearest friend, exclaimed: "Oh, he says he does n't like the kitchen fire — he only wants the pudding!" It would have taken the kitchen fire to account, at that moment, for the red of Sherringham's cheek; and he was indeed uncomfortably heated by helping to handle, as he phrased it, the saucepans.

This he felt so much after he had returned to his seat, which he forbore to quit again till the curtain had fallen on the last act, that in spite of the high beauty of that part of the performance of which Miriam carried the weight there was a moment when his emancipation led him to give a suppressed gasp of relief, as if he were scrambling up the bank of a torrent after an immersion. The girl herself, at any rate, as was wholly right, was of the incorruptible faith: she had been saturated to good purpose with the great spirit of Madame Carré. That was conspicuous as the play went on, and she watched over the detail with weary piety and passion. Sherringham had never liked the piece itself; he thought that as clumsy in form and false in feeling it did little honor to the British theatre; he hated many

of the speeches, pitied Miriam for having to utter them, and considered that, lighted by that sort of candle, the path of fame might very well lead nowhere.

When the rehearsal was over he went behind again, and in the rose-colored satin of the *dénoûment* the heroine of the occasion said to him: "Fancy my having to drag through that other stuff to-night — the brutes!" He was vague about the persons designated in this allusion, but he let it pass: he had at the moment a kind of detached foreboding of the way any gentleman familiarly connected with Miriam in the future would probably form the habit of letting objurgations and some other things pass. This had become, indeed, now, a frequent state of mind with him; the instant he was before her, near her, next her, he found himself a helpless subject of the spell which, so far at least as he was concerned, she put forth by contact and of which the potency was punctual and absolute: the fit came on, as he said, exactly as some esteemed express train on a great line bangs at a given moment into the station. At a distance he partly recovered himself — that was the encouragement for going to the shaky republic; but as soon as he entered her presence his life struck him as a thing disconnected from his will. It was as if *he* had been one thing and his behavior another; he had glimpses of pictures of this difference, drawn, as they might be, from the coming years — little

illustrative scenes in which he saw himself in strange attitudes of resignation, always rather sad and still, with a slightly bent head. Such images should not have been inspiring, but it is a fact that they were decidedly fascinating. The gentleman with the bent head had evidently given up something that was dear to him, but it was exactly because he had got his price that he was there. "Come and see me three or four hours hence," Miriam said — "come, that is, about six. I shall rest till then, but I want particularly to talk with you. There will be no one else — not the end of any one's nose. You 'll do me good." So of course Peter drove up to Balaklava Place about six.

XLI.

"I DON'T know — I have n't the least idea — I don't care — don't ask me," he broke out immediately, in answer to some question that she put to him, with little delay, about his sense of the way she had done certain things at the theatre. Had she not frankly better give up that way and return to their first idea, the one they had talked over so much? Sherringham declared that it was no idea of his; that, at any rate, he should never have another as long as he lived; and that, so help him heaven, they had talked such things over more than enough.

"You 're tired of me — yes, already," said Miriam, sadly and kindly. They were alone, her mother had not peeped out and she had prepared herself to return to the theatre. "However, it does n't matter, and of course your head is full of other things. You must think me ravenously selfish — perpetually chattering about my little shop. What will you have when one 's a shop-girl? You used to like it, but then you were n't a minister."

"What do you know about my being a minister?" Sherringham asked, leaning back in his chair and gazing at her from sombre eyes. Some-

times he thought she looked better on the stage than she did off it, and sometimes he thought the exact contrary. The former of these convictions had held his mind in the morning, and it was now punctually followed by the other. As soon as she stepped on the boards a great and special alteration usually took place in her — she was in focus and in her frame; yet there were hours too in which she wore her world's face before the audience, just as there were hours when she wore her stage face in the world. She took up either mask as it suited her humor. To-day Sherringham was seeing each in its order, and he thought each the best.

"I should know very little if I waited for you to tell me — that's very certain," Miriam answered. "It's in the papers that you've got a high appointment, but I don't read the papers unless there's something in them about myself. Next week I shall devour them and think them driveling too, no doubt. It was Basil Dashwood told me, this afternoon, of your promotion — he has seen it announced somewhere. I'm delighted if it gives you more money and more advantages, but don't expect me to be glad that you're going away to some distant, disgusting country."

"The matter has only just been settled and we've each been busy with our own affairs. Even if you hadn't given me these opportunities," Sherringham went on, "I should have tried to see you to-day, to tell you my news and take leave of you."

"Take leave? Are n't you coming to-morrow?"

"Oh, yes, I shall see you through that. But I shall rush away the very moment it 's over."

"I shall be much better then — really I shall," the girl said.

"The better you are the worse you are."

Miriam returned his gaze with a beautiful charity. "If it would do you any good I would be bad."

"The worse you are the better you are!" laughed Sherringham. "You 're a kind of devouring demon."

"Not a bit! It 's you."

"It 's I? I like that."

"It 's you who make trouble, who are sore and suspicious and supersubtle, not taking things as they come and for what they are, but twisting them into misery and falsity. Oh, I 've watched you enough, my dear friend, and I 've been sorry for you — and sorry for myself; for I 'm not so taken up with myself as you think. I 'm not such a low creature. I 'm capable of gratitude, I 'm capable of affection. One may live in paint and tinsel, but one is n't absolutely without a soul. Yes, I 've got one," the girl went on, "though I do paint my face and practice my intonations. If what you are going to do is good for you I 'm very glad. If it leads to good things, to honor and fortune and greatness, I 'm enchanted. If it means your being away always, forever and ever,

of course that 's serious. You know it — I need n't tell you — I regard you as I really don't regard any one else. I have a confidence in you — ah, it 's a luxury. You 're a gentleman, *mon bon* — ah, you 're a gentleman! It 's just that. And then you see, you understand, and that 's a luxury too. You 're a luxury altogether, Mr. Sherringham. Your being where I shall never see you is not a thing I shall enjoy; I know that from the separation of these last months — after our beautiful life in Paris, the best thing that ever happened to me or that ever will. But if it 's your career, if it 's your happiness, I can miss you and hold my tongue. I *can* be disinterested — I can!"

"What did you desire me to come for?" Sherringham asked, attentive and motionless. The same impression, the old impression, was with him again; the sense that if she was sincere it was sincerity of execution, if she was genuine it was the genuineness of doing it well. She did it so well now that this very fact was charming and touching. When she asked him, at the theatre, to grant her the hour in the afternoon, she wanted candidly (the more as she had not seen him at home for several days) to go over with him once again, on the eve of the great night (it would be for her second attempt the critics would lie so in wait — the first success might have been a fluke), some of her recurrent doubts: knowing from experience what good

ideas he often had, how he could give a worrying alternative its quietus at the last. Then she had heard from Dashwood of the change in his situation, and that had really from one moment to the other made her think sympathetically of his preoccupations — led her open-handedly to drop her own. She was sorry to lose him and eager to let him know how good a friend she was conscious that he had been to her. But the expression of this was already, at the end of a minute, a strange bedevilment: she began to listen to herself, to speak dramatically, to represent. She uttered the things she felt as if they were snatches of old play-books, and really felt them the more because they sounded so well. This, however, did n't prevent them from being as good feelings as those of anybody else, and at the moment Sherringham, to still a rising emotion — which he knew he should n't still — articulated the challenge I have just recorded, she seemed to him to have at any rate the truth of gentleness and generosity.

"There 's something the matter with you — you 're jealous," said Miriam. "You 're jealous of Mr. Dormer. That 's an example of the way you tangle everything up. Lord, he won't hurt you, nor me either!"

"He can't hurt me, my dear, and neither can you; for I have a nice little heart of stone and a smart new breastplate of iron. The interest I take in you is something quite extraordinary;

but the most extraordinary thing in it is that it 's perfectly prepared to tolerate the interest of others."

"The interest of others need n't trouble it much!" Miriam declared. "If Mr. Dormer has broken off his marriage to such an awfully fine woman (for she is that, your swell of a sister), it is n't for a loud wretch like me. He 's kind to me because that 's his nature, and he notices me because that 's his business; but he 's away up in the clouds — a thousand miles over my head. He has got something 'on,' as they say; he 's in love with an idea. I think it 's a shocking bad one, but that 's his own affair. He 's quite *exalté;* living on nectar and ambrosia — what he has to spare for us poor crawling things on earth is only a few dry crumbs. I did n't even ask him to come to rehearsal. Besides, he thinks you 're in love with me and that it would n't be honorable to cut in. He 's capable of that — is n't it charming?"

"If he were to relent and give up his scruples, would you marry him?" asked Sherringham.

"Mercy, how you chatter about marrying!" the girl laughed. "You 've all got it on the brain."

"Why, I put it that way to please you, because you complained to me last year precisely that this was not what seemed generally to be wanted."

"Oh, last year!" Miriam murmured. Then,

differently, "Yes, it's very tiresome!" she exclaimed.

"You told me, moreover, in Paris, more than once, that you would n't listen to anything but that."

"Well, I won't, but I shall wait till I find a husband who 's bad enough. One who 'll beat me and swindle me and spend my money on other women — that 's the sort of man for me. Mr. Dormer, delightful as he is, does n't come up to that."

"You 'll marry Basil Dashwood," Sherringham replied.

"Oh, marry? — call it marry, if you like. That 's what poor mother says — she lives in dread of it."

"To this hour," said Sherringham, "I have n't managed to make out what your mother wants. She has so many ideas, as Madame Carré said."

"She wants me to be a tremendous sort of creature — all her ideas are reducible to that. What makes the muddle is that she is n't clear about the kind of creature she wants most. A great actress or a great lady — sometimes she inclines for one and sometimes for the other; but on the whole she persuades herself that a great actress, if she 'll cultivate the right people, may *be* a great lady. When I tell her that won't do, and that a great actress can never be anything but a great vagabond, then the dear old thing has tantrums, and we have scenes — the most

grotesque: they 'd make the fortune, for a subject, of some play-writing fellow, if he had the wit to guess them; which, luckily for us, perhaps, he never will. She usually winds up by protesting — *devinez un peu quoi!*" Miriam added. And as her companion professed his complete inability to divine: "By declaring that rather than take it that way I must marry *you*."

"She 's shrewder than I thought. It 's the last of vanities to talk about it, but I may mention in passing that if you would marry me you should be the greatest of all possible ladies."

"Heavens, my dear fellow, what natural capacity have I for that?"

"You 're artist enough for anything. I shall be a great diplomatist: my resolution is firmly taken. I 'm infinitely cleverer than you have the least idea of, and you shall be a great diplomatist's wife."

"And the demon, the devil, the devourer and destroyer, that you are so fond of talking about: what, in such a position, do you do with that element of my nature? Où le fourrez-vous?"

"I 'll look after it, I 'll keep it under. Rather perhaps I should say, I 'll bribe it and lull it — I 'll gorge it with earthly grandeurs."

"That 's better," said Miriam; "for a demon that 's kept under is a shabby little demon. Don't let us be shabby." Then she added: "Do you really go away the beginning of next week?"

"Monday night, if possible."

"That 's to Paris. Before you go to your new post they must give you an interval here."

"I sha'n't take it — I 'm so tremendously keen for my duties. I shall insist on going sooner. Oh, I shall be concentrated now."

"I 'll come and act there," said Miriam, with her handsome smile. "I 've already forgotten what it was I wanted to discuss with you : it was some trumpery stuff. What I want to say now is only one thing : that it 's not in the least true that because my life pitches me in every direction and mixes me up with all sorts of people — or rather with one sort, mainly, poor dears ! — I have n't a decent character, I have n't common honesty. Your sympathy, your generosity, your patience, your precious suggestions, our dear, sweet days last summer in Paris, I shall never forget. You 're the best — you 're different from all the others. Think of me as you please, and make profane jokes about my matrimonial prospects — I shall think of *you* only in one way. I have a great respect for you. With all my heart I hope you 'll be a great diplomatist. God bless you ! "

Miriam got up as she spoke and in so doing she glanced at the clock — a movement which somehow only added to the noble gravity of her discourse : it was as if she were considering his time, not her own. Sherringham, at this, rising too, took out his watch and stood a moment with

his eyes bent upon it, though without in the least perceiving what the needles marked.

"You 'll have to go, to reach the theatre at your usual hour, won't you? Let me not keep you. That is, let me keep you only long enough just to say this, once for all, as I shall never speak of it again. I 'm going away to save myself," Sherringham went on, deliberately, standing before her and soliciting her eyes with his own. "I ought to go, no doubt, in silence, in decorum, in virtuous submission to hard necessity — without asking for credit or sympathy, without provoking any sort of scene or calling attention to my fortitude. But I can't — upon my soul I can't. I can go, I can see it through, but I can't hold my tongue. I want you to know all about it, so that over there, when I 'm bored to death, I shall at least have the exasperatingly vain consolation of feeling that you do know — and that it does neither you nor me any good!"

He paused a moment, upon which Miriam asked, "That I do know what?"

"That I have a consuming passion for you and that it 's impossible."

"Ah, impossible, my friend!" she sighed, but with a quickness in her assent.

"Very good; it interferes, the gratification of it would interfere fatally, with the ambition of each of us. Our ambitions are odious, but we are tied fast to them."

"Ah, why ain't we simple?" Miriam quavered.

"Why ain't we of the people — *comme tout le monde* — just a man and a girl liking each other?"

Sherringham hesitated a moment; she was so tenderly mocking, so sweetly ambiguous, as she said this. "Because we are precious asses! However, I'm simple enough, after all, to care for you as I have never cared for any human creature. You have, as it happens, a personal charm for me that no one has ever approached, and from the top of your splendid head to the sole of your theatrical shoe (I could go down on my face — there, abjectly — and kiss it!) every inch of you is dear and delightful to me. Therefore good-by."

Miriam stared, at this, with wider eyes: he had put the matter in a way that struck her. For a moment, all the same, he was afraid she would reply as if she had often heard that sort of thing before. But she was too much moved — the pure color that had risen to her face showed it — to have recourse to this particular facility. She was moved even to the glimmer of tears, though she gave him her hand with a smile. "I'm so glad you've said all that; for from you I know what it means. Certainly, it's better for you to go away. Of course it's all wrong, is n't it? — but that's the only thing it can be: therefore it's all right, is n't it? Some day when we're great people we'll talk these things over; then we shall be quiet, we shall be at peace — let us hope

so, at least — and better friends than people will know." She paused a moment, smiling still; then she said, while he held her hand: "Don't, *don't* come to-morrow night."

With this she attempted to draw her hand away, as if everything were settled and over; but the effect of her movement was that, as he held her hand tight, he was simply drawn toward her and close to her. The effect of this, in turn, was that, releasing her only to possess her more, he seized her in his arms and breathing deeply, "I love you!" clasped her in a long embrace. It was so long that it gave the door of the room time to open before either of them had taken notice. Mrs. Rooth, who had not peeped in before, peeped in now, becoming in this matter witness of an incident she could scarcely have expected. The unexpected, indeed, for Mrs. Rooth, had never been an insuperable element in things; it was her system, in general, to be too much in harmony to be surprised. As the others turned round they saw her standing there and smiling at them, and heard her ejaculate, with wise indulgence

"Oh, you extravagant children!"

Miriam brushed off her tears, quickly but unconfusedly. "He's going away — he's bidding us farewell."

Sherringham — it was perhaps a result of his general agitation — laughed out at the "us" (he had already laughed at the charge of puerility),

and Mrs. Rooth returned, "Going away? Ah, then I must have one too! And she held out both her hands. Sherringham stepped forward and, taking them, kissed her respectfully on each cheek, in the foreign manner, while she continued: "Our dear old friend — our kind, gallant gentleman!"

"The gallant gentleman has been promoted to a great post — the proper reward of his gallantry," Miriam said. "He 's going out as minister to some impossible place — where is it?"

"As minister — how very charming! We *are* getting on." And the old woman gave him a curious little upward interrogative leer.

"Oh, well enough. One must take what one can get," he answered.

"You 'll get everything now, I 'm sure, sha'n't you?" Mrs. Rooth asked, with an inflection that called back to him, comically (the source was so different), the very vibrations he had noted the day before in Lady Agnes's voice.

"He 's going to glory and he 'll forget all about us — forget that he has ever known such people. So we shall never see him again, and it 's better so. Good-by, good-by," Miriam re-repeated; "the brougham must be there, but I won't take you. I want to talk to mother about you, and we shall say things not fit for you to hear. Oh, I 'll let you know what we lose — don't be afraid," she added to Mrs. Rooth. "He 's the rising star of diplomacy."

"I knew it from the first — I know how things turn out for such people as you!" cried the old woman, gazing fondly at Sherringham. "But you don't mean to say you 're not coming to-morrow night?"

"Don't — don't; it 's great folly," Miriam interposed; "and it 's quite needless, since you saw me to-day."

Sherringham stood looking from the mother to the daughter, the former of whom broke out to the latter: "Oh, you dear rogue, to say one has *seen* you yet! You know how you 'll come up to it; you 'll be transcendent."

"Yes, I shall be there — certainly," said Sherringham, at the door, to Mrs. Rooth.

"Oh, you dreadful goose!" Miriam called after him. But he went out without looking round at her.

XLII.

Nick Dormer had for the hour quite taken up his abode at his studio, where Biddy usually arrived after breakfast to give him news of the state of affairs in Calcutta Gardens, and where many letters and telegrams were now addressed to him. Among such missives, on the morning of the Saturday on which Peter Sherringham had promised to dine at the other house, was a note from Miriam Rooth, informing Nick that if he should not telegraph to put her off she would turn up about half past eleven, probably with her mother, for just one more sitting. She added that it was a nervous day for her and that she could n't keep still, so that it would really be very kind to let her come to him as a refuge. She wished to stay away from the theatre, where everything was now settled (or so much the worse for the others if it was n't), till the evening, but if she were left to herself should be sure to go there. It would keep her quiet and soothe her to sit — he could keep her quiet (he was such a blessing that way !) at any time. Therefore she would give him two or three hours — or rather she would ask him for them — if he did n't positively turn her from the door.

It had not been definite to Nick that he wanted another sitting at all for the slight work, as he held it to be, that Miriam had already helped him to achieve. He regarded this work as a kind of pictorial *obiter dictum:* he had made what he could of it and would have been at a loss to see how he could make more. If it was not finished, this was because it was not finishable; at any rate he had said all he had to say in that particular phrase. Nick Dormer, as it happened, was not just now in the highest spirits; his imagination had within two or three days become conscious of a check which he tried to explain by the idea of a natural reaction. Any important change, any new selection, in one's life was exciting, and exaggerate that importance and one's own as little as one would, there was an inevitable strong emotion in renouncing, in the face of considerable opposition, one sort of responsibility for another sort. That made life not perhaps necessarily joyous, but decidedly thrilling, for the hour; and it was all very well till the thrill abated. When this occurred, as it inevitably would, the romance and the poetry of the thing would be exchanged for the flatness and the prose. It was to these latter elements that Nick Dormer had waked up pretty wide on this particular morning; and the prospect was not appreciably more blooming from the fact that he had warned himself in advance that it would be dull. He had known how dull it would

be, but now he would have time to learn that even better. A reaction was a reaction, but it was not after all a catastrophe. A part of its privilege would be to make him ask himself if he had not committed a great mistake; that privilege would doubtless even remain within the limits of its nature in leading him to reply to this question in the affirmative. But he would live to withdraw such a concession — this was the first thing to bear in mind.

He was occupied, even while he dressed, in the effort to get forward, mentally, with some such retractation, when, by the first post, Miriam's note arrived. At first it did little to help him in his effort, for it made him contrast her eagerness with his own want of alacrity and ask himself what the deuce he should do with her. Ambition, with her, was always on the charge, and she was not a person to conceive that others might, in bad moments, listen for the trumpet in vain. It would never have occurred to her that only the day before he had spent a portion of the afternoon quite at the bottom of the hill. He had in fact turned into the National Gallery and had wandered about there for more than one hour, and it was just while he did so that the immitigable recoil had begun perversely to set in. And the perversity was all the greater from the circumstance that if the experience was depressing it was not because he had been discouraged beyond measure by the sight of the grand

things that had been done — things so much grander than any that would ever bear his signature. That variation he was duly acquainted with and should taste in abundance again. What had happened to him, as he passed on this occasion from Titian to Rubens and from Gainsborough to Rembrandt, was that he found himself calling the whole art literally into question. What was it, after all, at the best, and why had people given it so high a place? Its weakness, its narrowness appeared to him; tacitly blaspheming, he looked at several world-famous performances with a lustreless eye. That is, he blasphemed if it were blasphemy to say to himself that, with all respect, they were a poor business, only well enough in their small way. The force that produced them was not one of the greatest forces in human affairs; their place was inferior and their connection with the life of man casual and slight. They represented so inadequately the idea, and it was the idea that won the race, that in the long run came in first. He had incontestably been in much closer relation to the idea a few months before than he was to-day: it made up a great deal for the bad side of politics that they were after all a clumsy system for applying and propagating the idea. The love of it had really been, at certain hours, at the bottom of his disposition to follow them up; though this had not been what he used to talk of most with his political comrades or even with Julia. Cer-

tainly, political as Julia was, he had not conferred with her much about the idea. However, this might have been his own fault quite as much as hers, and she probably took such an enthusiasm for granted — she took such a tremendous lot of things for granted. On the other hand he had put this enthusiasm forward frequently in his many discussions with Gabriel Nash, with the effect, it is true, of making that worthy scoff transcendentally at what he was pleased to term his hypocrisy. Gabriel maintained precisely that there were more ideas, more of those that man lived by, in a single room of the National Gallery than in all the statutes of Parliament. Nick had replied to this more than once that the determination of what man did live by was required; to which Nash had retorted (and it was very rarely that he quoted Scripture) that it was at any rate not by bread and butter alone. The statutes of Parliament gave him bread and butter *tout au plus*.

Nick Dormer, at present, had no pretension of trying this question over again: he reminded himself that his ambiguity was subjective, as the philosophers said; the result of a mood which in due course would be at the mercy of another mood. It made him curse, and cursing, as a finality, was shaky; so he would throw out a platform beyond it. The time far beyond others to do one's work was when it did n't seem worth doing, for then one gave it a brilliant chance,

that of resisting the stiffest test of all — the test of striking one as very bad. To do the most when there would be the least to be got by it was to be most in the true spirit of production. One thing, at any rate, was very certain, Nick reflected: nothing on earth would induce him to change back again; not even if this twilight of the soul should last for the rest of his days. He hardened himself in his posture with a good conscience, which, had they had a glimpse of it, would have made him still more diverting to those who already thought him so; but now, by good fortune, Miriam suddenly knocked together the little bridge that was wanted to carry him over to more elastic ground. If he had made his sketch it was a proof that he had done her, and that he had done her flashed upon him as a sign that she would be still more feasible. He found his platform, as I have called it, and for a moment, in his relief, he danced upon it. He sent out a telegram to Balaklava Place requesting his beautiful sitter by no manner of means to fail him. When his servant came back, it was to usher into the studio Peter Sherringham, whom the man had apparently found at the door.

The hour was so early for social intercourse that Nick immediately guessed his visitor had come on some rare errand; but this inference was instantly followed by the reflection that Peter might after all only wish to make up by present zeal for not having been near him before.

He forgot that, as he had subsequently learned from Biddy, their foreign, or all but foreign, cousin had spent an hour in Rosedale Road, missing him there but pulling out Miriam's portrait, the day of his own hurried visit to Beauclere. These young men were not on a ceremonious footing, and it was not in Nick's nature to keep a record of civilities rendered or omitted; nevertheless he had been vaguely conscious that during a stay in London, on Peter's part, which apparently was stretching itself out, he and his kinsman had foregathered less than of yore. It was indeed an absorbing moment in the career of each, but at the same time that he recognized this truth Nick remembered that it was not impossible Peter might have taken upon himself to resent some supposititious failure of consideration for Julia; though this would have been stupid, and the newly appointed minister (to he had forgotten where) cultivated a finer habit. Nick held that as he had treated Julia with studious generosity she had nothing whatever to reproach him with; so her brother had therefore still less. It was at any rate none of her brother's business. There were only two things that would have made Nick lukewarm about disposing in a few frank words of all this: one of them his general hatred of talking of his private affairs (a reluctance in which he and Peter were well matched); and the other a particular sentiment which would have involved more of a

confession, and which could not be otherwise described than as a perception that the most definite and even most pleasant consequence of the collapse of his engagement was, as it happened, an extreme consciousness of freedom. Nick Dormer's observation was of a different sort from his cousin's; he noted much less the signs of the hour and kept altogether a looser register of life; nevertheless, just as one of our young men had during these days in London found the air peopled with personal influences, the concussion of human atoms, so the other, though only asking to live without too many questions and work without too many disasters, to be glad and sorry in short on easy terms, had become aware of a certain social tightness, of the fact that life is crowded and passion restless, accident frequent and community inevitable. Everybody with whom one had relations had other relations too, and even optimism was a mixture and peace an embroilment. The only chance was to let everything be embroiled but one's temper and everything spoiled but one's work. It must be added that Nick sometimes took precautions against irritation which were in excess of the danger, as departing travelers, about to whiz through foreign countries, study phrase-books for combinations of words they will never use. He was at home in the brightness of things — his longest excursions across the border were short. He had a dim sense that Peter considered that he

made him uncomfortable, and might have come now to tell him so; in which case he should be sorry for Peter in various ways. But as soon as his visitor began to speak Nick felt suspicion fade into old friendliness, and this in spite of the fact that Peter's speech had a slightly exaggerated promptitude, like the promptitude of business, which might have denoted self-consciousness. To Nick it quickly appeared better to be glad than to be sorry: this simple argument was more than sufficient to make him glad Peter was there.

"My dear Nick, it 's an unpardonable hour, is n't it? I was n't even sure you 'd be up, and yet I had to risk it, because my hours are numbered. I 'm going away to-morrow," Peter went on; "I 've a thousand things to do. I 've had no talk with you this time such as we used to have of old (it 's an irreparable loss, but it 's your fault, you know), and as I 've got to rush about all day I thought I 'd just catch you before any one else does."

"Some one has already caught me, but there 's plenty of time," Nick returned.

Peter stared a moment, as if he were going to ask a question: then he thought better of this and said: "I see, I see. I 'm sorry to say I 've only a few minutes at best."

"Man of crushing responsibilities, you 've come to humiliate me!" Nick exclaimed. "I know all about it."

"It 's more than I do, then. That 's not what I 've come for, but I shall be delighted if I humiliate you a little by the way. I 've two things in mind, and I 'll mention the most difficult first. I came here the other day — the day after my arrival in town."

"Ah, yes, so you did; it was very good of you," Nick interrupted, as if he remembered. "I ought to have returned your visit, or left a card, or written my name, or something, in Great Stanhope Street, ought n't I? You had n't got this new thing then, or I would have done so."

Peter eyed him a moment. "I say, what 's the matter with you? Am I really unforgivable for having taken that liberty?"

"What liberty?" Nick looked now as if there were nothing whatever the matter with him, and indeed his visitor's allusion was not clear to him. He was thinking only for the instant of Biddy, of whom and whose secret inclinations Grace had insisted on talking to him. They were none of his business, and if he would not for the world have let the girl herself suspect that he had violent lights on what was most screened and curtained in her, much less would he have made Peter a clumsy present of this knowledge. Grace had a queer theory that Peter treated Biddy badly — treated them all, somehow, badly; but Grace's zeal (she had plenty of it, though she affected all sorts of fine indifference) almost always took the form of being wrong. Nick wanted to do only

what Biddy would thank him for, and he knew very well what she would n't. She wished him and Peter to be great friends, and the only obstacle to this was that Peter was too much of a diplomatist. Peter made him, for an instant, think of her and of the hour they had lately spent together in the studio in his absence — an hour of which Biddy had given him a history full of detail and of omissions; and this in turn brought Nick's imagination back to his visitor's own side of the matter. That complexity of things of which the sense had lately increased with him, and to which it was owing that any thread one might take hold of would probably lead one to something discomfortable, was illustrated by the fact that while poor Biddy was thinking of Peter it was ten to one that poor Peter was thinking of Miriam Rooth. All this danced before Nick's intellectual vision for a space briefer than my too numerous words.

"I pitched into your treasures — I rummaged among your canvases," Peter said. "Biddy had nothing whatever to do with it — she maintained an attitude of irreproachable reserve. It has been on my conscience all these days, and I ought to have done penance before. I have been putting it off partly because I am so ashamed of my indiscretion. *Que voulez-vous*, my dear Nick? My provocation was great. I heard you had been painting Miss Rooth, so that I could n't restrain my curiosity. I simply went into that corner and

struck out there — a trifle wildly, no doubt. I dragged the young lady to the light — your sister turned pale as she saw me. It was a good deal like breaking open one of your letters, was n't it? However, I assure you it 's all right, for I congratulate you both on your style and on your correspondent."

"You 're as clever, as witty, as humorous, as ever, old boy," Nick rejoined, going himself into the corner designated by his companion and laying his hands on the same canvas. "Your curiosity is the highest possible tribute to my little attempt, and your sympathy sets me right with myself. There is she again," Nick went on, thrusting the picture into an empty frame; "you shall see her whether you wish to or not."

"Right with yourself? You don't mean to say you 've been wrong!" Sherringham returned, standing opposite the portrait.

"Oh, I don't know; I 've been kicking up such a row; anything is better than a row."

"She 's awfully good — she 's awfully true," said Sherringham. "You 've done more to it, since the other day; you 've put in several things."

"Yes, but I 've worked distractedly. I 've not altogether conformed to the celebrated recommendation about being off with the old love."

"With the old love?" Sherringham repeated, looking hard at the picture.

"Before you are on with the new!" Nick had

no sooner uttered these words than he colored; it occurred to him that Peter would probably think he was alluding to Julia. He therefore added quickly: "It is n't so easy to cease to represent an affectionate constituency. Really, most of my time for a fortnight has been given up to letter-writing. They 've all been unexpectedly charming. I should have thought they would have loathed and despised me. But not a bit of it; they cling to me fondly — they struggle with me tenderly. I 've been down to talk with them about it, and we 've passed the most sociable, delightful hours. I 've designated my successor; I 've felt a good deal like the Emperor Charles the Fifth when about to retire to the monastery of Yuste. The more I 've seen of them, in this way, the more I 've liked them, and they declare it has been the same with themselves as regards me. We spend our time in assuring each other that we have n't begun to know each other till now. In short, it 's all wonderfully jolly, but it is n't business. C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre."

"They are not so charming as they might be if they don't offer to keep you and let you paint."

"They do, almost; it 's fantastic," said Nick. "Remember they have n't seen any of my painting yet."

"Well, I 'm sorry for you; we live in too enlightened an age," Peter declared. "You can't

suffer for art. Your experience is interesting; it seems to show that, at the tremendous pitch of civilization we've reached, you can't suffer from anything but hunger."

"I shall doubtless do that in abundance."

"Never, never, when you paint as well as this."

"Oh, come, you're too good to be true," Nick replied. "But where did you learn that one's larder is full in proportion as one's work is fine?"

Peter gave him no satisfaction on this curious point — he only continued to look at the picture; after which, in a moment, he said: "I'll give you your price for it on the spot."

"Dear boy, you're so magnanimous that you shall have it for nothing!" Nick exclaimed, passing his arm into his companion's.

Peter was silent at first. "Why do you call me magnanimous?"

"Oh, bless my soul, it's hers — I forget!" laughed Nick, failing in his turn to answer the other's inquiry. "But you shall have another."

"Another? Are you going to do another?"

"This very morning. That is, I shall begin it. I've heard from her; she's coming to sit — a short time hence."

Peter turned away a little at this, releasing himself, and, as if the movement had been an effect of Nick's words, looked at his watch earnestly, to dissipate that appearance. He fell back,

to consider the picture from further off. "The more you do her the better; she has all the qualities of a great model. From that point of view it's a pity she has another trade: she might make so good a thing of this one. But how shall you do her again?" Sherringham continued, ingenuously.

"Oh, I can scarcely say; we'll arrange something; we'll talk it over. It's extraordinary how well she enters into what one wants: she knows more than one does one's self. She isn't the first comer. However, you know all about that since you invented her, didn't you? That's what she says; she's awfully sweet on you," Nick pursued. "What I ought to do is to try something as different as possible from that thing; not the sibyl, the muse, the tremendous creature, but the charming woman, the person one knows, in different gear, as she appears *en ville*, as she calls it. I'll do something really serious and send it to you out there with my respects. It will remind you of home, and perhaps a little even of me. If she knows it's for you she'll throw herself into it in the right spirit. Leave it to us, my dear fellow; we'll turn out something good."

"It's jolly to hear you; but I shall send you a cheque," said Peter.

"I suppose it's all right in your position, but you're too proud," his kinsman answered.

"What do you mean by my position?"

"Your exaltation, your high connection with the country, your treating with sovereign powers as the representative of a sovereign power. Is n't that what they call 'em?"

Sherringham, who had turned again toward his companion, listened to this with his eyes fixed on Nick's face, while at the same time he once more drew forth his watch. "Brute!" he exclaimed familiarly, at the same time dropping his eyes on the watch. "At what time did you say you expected your sitter?"

"Oh, we 've plenty of time; don't be afraid of letting me see you agitated by her presence."

"Brute!" Sherringham again ejaculated.

This friendly personal note cleared the air, made the communication between the two men closer. "Stay with me and talk to me," said Nick; "I dare say it's good for me. Heaven knows when I shall see you so independently again."

"Have you got something more to show me, then — some other work?" Sherringham asked.

"Must I bribe you by setting my sign-boards in a row? You know what I 've done; by which I mean of course you know what I have n't done. My work, as you are so good as to call it, has hitherto been horrible rot. I 've had no time, no opportunity, no continuity. I must go and sit down in a corner and learn my alphabet. That thing is n't good; what I shall do for you won't be good. Don't protest, my dear fellow; no-

thing will be fit to look at for a long time. And think of my ridiculous age. As the good people say (or don't they say it?) it's a rum go. It won't be amusing."

"Oh, you're so clever you'll get on fast," Sherringham replied, trying to think how he could most directly disobey his companion's injunction not to protest.

"I mean it won't be amusing for others," said Nick, unperturbed by this violation. "They want results, and small blame to them."

"Well, whatever you do, don't talk like Mr. Gabriel Nash," Peter went on. "Sometimes I think you're just going to."

Nick stared a moment. "Why, he never would have said that. 'They want results, the damned fools'—that would have been more in his key."

"It's the difference of a *nuance*. And are you extraordinarily happy?" Peter added, as Nick now obliged him by arranging half a dozen canvases so that he could look at them.

"Not so much so, doubtless, as the artistic life ought to make one: because all one's people are not so infatuated as one's electors. But little by little I'm learning the beauty of obstinacy."

"Your mother's very bad; I lunched with her the day before yesterday."

"Yes, I know—I know," said Nick hastily; "but it's too late—it's too late. I must just

peg away here and not mind. I've after all a great advantage in my life."

Sherringham hesitated. "And that would be — ?"

"Oh, I mean knowing what I want to do; that's everything, you know."

"It's an advantage, however, that you've only just come in for, is n't it?"

"Yes, but having waited only makes me prize it the more. I've got it now; and it makes up, for the present, for the absence of some other things."

Again Sherringham was silent awhile. "That sounds a little flat," he remarked at last.

"It depends upon what you compare it with. It's rather more pointed than the House of Commons."

"Oh, I never thought I should like that."

There was another pause, during which Nick moved about the room, turning up old sketches to see if he had anything more to show his visitor, while Sherringham continued to look at the unfinished and in some cases, as it seemed to him, unpromising productions already submitted to his attention. They were much less interesting than the portrait of Miriam Rooth, and, it would have appeared, much less significant of ability. For that particular effort Nick's talent had taken an unprecedented spring. This was the reflection that Peter made, as he had made it, intensely, before; but the words he presently

uttered had no visible connection with it. They only consisted of the abrupt inquiry: "Have you heard anything from Julia?"

"Not a syllable. Have you?"

"Dear, no; she never writes to me."

"But won't she, on the occasion of your promotion?"

"I dare say not," said Peter: and this was the only reference to Mrs. Dallow that passed between her brother and her late intended. It left a slight agitation of the atmosphere, which Sherringham proceeded to allay by an allusion comparatively speaking more relevant. He expressed disappointment that Biddy should not have come in; having had an idea that she was always in Rosedale Road of a morning. That was the other moiety of his present errand — the wish to see her and give her a message for Lady Agnes, upon whom, at so early an hour, he had not presumed to intrude in Calcutta Gardens. Nick replied that Biddy did in point of fact almost always turn up, and for the most part early; she came to wish him good-morning and start him for the day. She was a devoted Electra, laying a cool, healing hand on a distracted Orestes. He reminded Peter, however, that he would have a chance of seeing her that evening, and of seeing Lady Agnes; for was n't he to do them the honor of dining in Calcutta Gardens? Biddy, the day before, had arrived full of that excitement. Peter explained that this was exactly the sad subject of

his actual *démarche:* the project of the dinner in Calcutta Gardens had, to his exceeding regret, fallen to pieces. The fact was (did n't Nick know it?) the night had been suddenly and perversely fixed for Miriam's *première*, and he was under a definite engagement with her not to stay away from it. To add to the bore of the thing he was obliged to return to Paris the very next morning. He was quite awfully sorry, for he had promised Lady Agnes: he did n't understand then about Miriam's affair, in regard to which he had given a previous pledge. He was more sorry than he could say, but he could never fail Miss Rooth: he had professed from the first an interest in her which he must live up to a little more. This was his last chance — he had n't been near her at the trying time she first produced herself. And the second night of the play would n't do — it must be the first or nothing. Besides, he could n't wait over till Monday.

While Peter enumerated these complications his companion was occupied in polishing with a cloth a palette that he had just been scraping. "I see what you mean — I 'm very sorry too," said Nick. "I 'm sorry you can't give my mother this joy — I give her so little."

"My dear fellow, you might give her a little more. It 's rather too much to expect *me* to make up for your omissions!"

Nick looked at Peter with a moment's fixedness while he rubbed his palette; and for that moment

he felt the temptation to reply: "There 's a way you could do that, to a considerable extent — I think you guess it — which would n't be intrinsically disagreeable." But the impulse passed, without expressing itself in speech, and he simply answered: "You can make this all clear to Biddy when she comes, and she 'll make it clear to my mother."

"Poor little Biddy!" Sherringham mentally exclaimed, thinking of the girl with that job before her; but what he articulated was that this was exactly why he had come to the studio. He had inflicted his company on Lady Agnes on Thursday, and had partaken of a meal with her, but he had not seen Biddy, though he had waited for her, hoping she would come in. Now he would wait for her again — she was thoroughly worth it.

"Patience, patience, you 've always me," said Nick; to which he subjoined, "If it 's a question of going to the play I scarcely see why you should n't dine at my mother's all the same. People go to the play after dinner."

"Yes, but it would n't be fair, it would n't be decent: it 's a case when I must be in my seat from the rise of the curtain. I should force your mother to dine an hour earlier than usual, and then, in return for this courtesy, go off to my entertainment at eight o'clock, leaving her and Grace and Biddy languishing there. I wish I had proposed in time that they should go with me," Peter continued, not very ingenuously.

"You might do that still," Nick suggested.

"Oh, at this time of day it would be impossible to get a box."

"I 'll speak to Miss Rooth about it, if you like, when she comes," smiled Nick.

"No, it would n't do," said Peter, turning away and looking once more at his watch. He made tacitly the addition that, still less than asking Lady Agnes, for his convenience, to dine early, would *this* be decent, would it be fair. His taking Biddy the night he dined with her and with Miss Tressilian had been something very like a violation of those proprieties. He could n't say this to Nick, who remarked in a moment that it was all right, for Peter 's action left him his own freedom.

"Your own freedom?" Peter echoed interrogatively, turning round.

"Why, you see now I can go to the theatre myself."

"Certainly; I had n't thought of that. You would have been going."

"I gave it up for the prospect of your company."

"Upon my word, you 're too good — I don't deserve such sacrifices," said Sherringham, who saw from Nick's face that this was not a figure of speech but the absolute truth. "Did n't it, however, occur to you that, as it would turn out, I might — that I even naturally would — myself be going?" he added.

Nick broke into a laugh. "It would have occurred to me if I understood a little better — " And he paused, still laughing.

"If you understood a little better what?" Peter demanded.

"Your situation, simply."

Peter looked at him a moment. "Dine with me to-night, independently; we 'll go to the theatre together, and then you 'll understand it."

"With pleasure, with pleasure: we 'll have a jolly evening," said Nick.

"Call it jolly if you like. When did you say she was coming?" Peter asked.

"Biddy? Oh, probably, as I tell you, at any moment."

"I mean the great Miriam," Peter replied.

"The great Miriam, if she 's punctual, will be here in about forty minutes."

"And will she be likely to find your sister?"

"My dear fellow, that will depend on whether my sister remains to see her."

"Exactly; but the point is whether you 'll allow her to remain, is n't it?"

Nick looked slightly mystified. "Why should n't she do as she likes?"

"In that case she 'll probably go."

"Yes, unless she stays."

"Don't let her," Peter dropped; "send her away." And to explain this he added, "It does n't seem exactly the right sort of thing, young

girls meeting actresses." His explanation, in turn, struck him as requiring another clause; so he went on: "At least it is n't thought the right sort of thing abroad, and even in England my foreign ideas stick to me."

Even with this amplification, however, his proposition evidently still appeared to his companion to have a flaw; which, after he had considered it a moment, Nick exposed in the simple words: "Why, you originally introduced them, in Paris — Biddy and Miss Rooth. Did n't they meet at your rooms and fraternize, and was n't that much more abroad than this?"

"So they did, but she did n't like it," Peter answered, suspecting that, for a diplomatist, he looked foolish.

"Miss Rooth did n't like it?" Nick persisted.

"That I confess I 've forgotten. Besides, she was not an actress then. What I remember is that Biddy was n't particularly pleased with her."

"Why, she thought her wonderful — praised her to the skies. I remember too."

"She did n't like her as a woman; she praised her as an actress."

"I thought you said she was n't an actress then," Nick rejoined.

Peter hesitated. "Oh, Biddy thought so. She has seen her since, moreover. I took her the other night, and her curiosity 's satisfied."

"It 's not of any consequence, and if there 's a

reason for it I 'll bundle her off directly. But the great Miriam seems such a kind, good woman."

"So she is, charming — charming," said Peter, looking hard at Nick.

"Here comes Biddy now," this young man went on. "I hear her at the door: you can warn her yourself."

"It is n't a question of 'warning' — that 's not in the least my idea. But I 'll take Biddy away," said Peter.

"That will be still more energetic."

"Oh, it 's simply selfish — I like her company." Peter had turned, as if to go to the door to meet the girl; but he quickly checked himself, lingering in the middle of the room; and the next instant Biddy had come in. When she saw him there she also stopped.

XLIII.

"ARRIVE, arrive, my child," said Nick. "Peter's weary of waiting for you."

"Ah, he's come to say he won't dine with us to-night!" Biddy stood with her hand on the latch.

"I leave town to-morrow: I've everything to do; I'm broken-hearted; it's impossible," Peter pleaded. "Please make my peace with your mother; I'm ashamed of not having written to her last night."

Biddy closed the door and came in, while her brother said to her, "How in the world did you guess it?"

"I saw it in the 'Morning Post,'" Biddy answered, looking at Peter.

"In the 'Morning Post'?" her cousin repeated.

"I saw there's to be a first night at that theatre, the one you took us to. So I said, 'Oh, he'll go there.'"

"Yes, I've got to do that too," Peter admitted.

"She's going to sit to me again this morning, the wonderful actress of that theatre — she has made an appointment: so you see I'm getting on," Nick announced to Biddy.

"Oh, I 'm so glad — she 's so splendid!" The girl looked away from Peter now, but not, though it seemed to fill the place, at the triumphant portrait of Miriam Rooth.

"I 'm delighted you 've come in. I *have* waited for you," Peter hastened to declare to Biddy, though he was conscious that this was, under the circumstances, meagre.

"Are n't you coming to see us again?"

"I 'm in despair, but I shall really not have time. Therefore it 's a blessing not to have missed you here."

"I 'm very glad," said Biddy. Then she added: "And you 're going to America — to stay a long time?"

"Till I 'm sent to some better place."

"And will that better place be as far away?"

"Oh, Biddy, it would n't be better then," said Peter.

"Do you mean they 'll give you something to do at home?"

"Hardly that. But I 've got a tremendous lot to do at home to-day." For the twentieth time Peter referred to his watch.

Biddy turned to her brother, who murmured to her, "You might bid me good-morning." She kissed him, and he asked what the news might be in Calcutta Gardens; to which she replied:

"The only news is, of course, that, poor dears! they 're making great preparations for Peter. Mamma thinks you must have had such a nasty

dinner the other day," the girl continued, to the guest of that romantic occasion.

"Faithless Peter!" said Nick, beginning to whistle and to arrange a canvas in anticipation of Miriam's arrival.

"Dear Biddy, thank your stars you are not in my horrid profession," protested the personage thus designated. "One is bowled about like a cricket-ball, unable to answer for one's freedom or one's comfort from one moment to another."

"Oh, ours is the true profession — Biddy's and mine," Nick broke out, setting up his canvas: "the career of liberty and peace, of charming long mornings, spent in a still north light, in the contemplation, and I may even say in the company, of the amiable and the beautiful."

"That certainly is the case when Biddy comes to see you," Peter returned.

Biddy smiled at him. "I come every day. *Anch' io son pittore!* I encourage Nick awfully."

"It 's a pity I 'm not a martyr; she would bravely perish with me," Nick said.

"You are — you are a martyr — when people say such odious things!" the girl cried. "They do say them. I 've heard many more than I 've repeated to you."

"It 's you yourself, then, indignant and sympathetic, who are the martyr," observed Peter, who wanted greatly to be kind to her.

"Oh, I don't care!" she answered, coloring in

response to this; and she continued, to Peter: "Don't you think one can do as much good by painting great works of art as by — as by what papa used to do? Don't you think art is necessary to the happiness, to the greatness of a people? Don't you think it's manly and honorable? Do you think a passion for it is a thing to be ashamed of? Don't you think the artist — the conscientious, the serious one — is as distinguished a member of society as any one else?"

Peter and Nick looked at each other and laughed at the way she had got up her subject, and Nick asked his visitor if she did n't express it all in perfection. "I delight, in general, in artists, but I delight still more in their defenders," Peter jested, to Biddy.

"Ah, don't attack me, if you're wise," Nick said.

"One is tempted to, when it makes Biddy so fine."

"Well, that's the way she encourages me: it's meat and drink to me," Nick went on. "At the same time I'm bound to say there is a little whistling in the dark in it."

"In the dark?" his sister demanded.

"The obscurity, my dear child, of your own aspirations, your mysterious ambitions and plastic visions. Are n't there some heavyish shadows there?"

"Why, I never cared for politics."

"No, but you cared for life, you cared for so-

ciety, and you have chosen the path of solitude and concentration."

"You horrid boy!" said Biddy.

"Give it up, that arduous steep — give it up and come out with me," Peter interposed.

"Come out with you?"

"Let us walk a little, or even drive a little. Let us at any rate talk a little."

"I thought you had so much to do," Biddy candidly objected.

"So I have, but why should n't you do a part of it with me? Would there be any harm? I 'm going to some tiresome shops — you 'll cheer the economical hour."

The girl hesitated; then she turned to Nick. "Would there be any harm?"

"Oh, it 's none of *his* business!" Peter protested.

"He had better take you home to your mother."

"I 'm going home — I sha'n't stay here to-day," said Biddy. Then, to Peter: "I came in a hansom, but I shall walk back. Come that way with me."

"With singular pleasure. But I shall not be able to go in," Sherringham added.

"Oh, that 's no matter," said Biddy. "Good-by, Nick."

"You understand, then, that we dine together — at seven sharp. Would n't a club be best?" Peter, before going, inquired of Nick. He sug-

gested further which club it should be; and his words led Biddy, who had directed her steps toward the door, to turn a moment, as if she were on the point of asking reproachfully whether it was for this Peter had given up Calcutta Gardens. But this impulse, if impulse it was, had no sequel except so far as it was a sequel that Peter spontaneously explained to her, after Nick had assented to his conditions, that her brother too had a desire to go to Miss Rooth's first night and had already promised to accompany him.

"Oh, that 's perfect; it will be so good for him — won't it? — if he 's going to paint her again," Biddy responded.

"I think there 's nothing so good for him as that he happens to have such a sister as you," Peter observed, as they went out. As he spoke he heard, outside, the sound of a carriage stopping; and before Biddy, who was in front of him, opened the door of the house he had time to say to himself, "What a bore — there 's Miriam!" The opened door showed him that he was right — this young lady was in the act of alighting from the brougham provided by Basil Dashwood's thrifty zeal. Her mother followed her, and both the new visitors exclaimed and rejoiced, in their demonstrative way, as their eyes fell upon their valued friend. The door had closed behind Peter, but he instantly and violently rang, so that they should be admitted with as little delay as possible, while he remained slightly disconcerted by

the prompt occurrence of an encounter he had sought to avert. It ministered, moreover, a little to this particular sensation that Miriam appeared to have come somewhat before her time. The incident promised, however, to pass off in the happiest way. Before he knew it both the ladies had taken possession of Biddy, who looked at them with comparative coldness, tempered indeed by a faint glow of apprehension, and Miriam had broken out:

"We know you, we know you; we saw you in Paris, and you came to my theatre a short time ago with Mr. Sherringham."

"We know your mother, Lady Agnes Dormer. I hope her ladyship is very well," said Mrs. Rooth, who had never struck Sherringham as a more objectionable old woman.

"You offered to do a head of me, or something or other: did n't you tell me you work in clay? I dare say you 've forgotten all about it, but I should be delighted," Miriam pursued, with the richest urbanity.

Peter was not concerned with her mother's pervasiveness, though he did n't like Biddy to see even that; but he hoped his companion would take the overcharged benevolence of the young actress in the spirit in which, rather to his surprise, it evidently was offered.

"I 've sat to your clever brother many times," said Miriam; "I 'm going to sit again. I dare say you 've seen what we 've done — he 's too delightful. Si vous saviez comme cela me re-

pose!" she added, turning for a moment to Sherringham. Then she continued, smiling, to Biddy: "Only he ought n't to have thrown up such prospects, you know. I have an idea I was n't nice to you that day in Paris — I was nervous and scared and perverse. I remember perfectly; I *was* odious. But I 'm better now — you 'd see if you were to know me. I 'm not a bad girl — really I 'm not. But you must have your own friends. Happy they — you look so charming! Immensely like Mr. Dormer, especially about the eyes; is n't she, mamma?"

"She comes of a beautiful Norman race — the finest, purest strain," the old woman simpered. "Mr. Dormer is sometimes so good as to come and see us — we are always at home on Sunday; and if some day you were so venturesome as to come with him you might perhaps find it pleasant, though very different, of course, from the circle in which you habitually move."

Biddy murmured a vague recognition of these wonderful civilities, and Miriam commented: "Different, yes; but we 're all right, you know. Do come," she added. Then turning to Sherringham, "Remember what I told you — I don't expect you to-night."

"Oh, I understand; I shall come," Peter answered, growing red.

"It will be idiotic. Keep him, keep him away — don't let him," Miriam went on, to Biddy; with which, as Nick's portals now were gaping, she drew her mother away.

Peter, at this, walked off briskly with Biddy, dropping, as he did so, "She's too fantastic!"

"Yes, but so tremendously good-looking. I shall ask Nick to take me there," the girl continued, after a moment.

"Well, she'll do you no harm. They're all right, as she says. It's the world of art — you were standing up so for art, just now."

"Oh, I was n't thinking so much of that kind," said Biddy.

"There's only one kind — it's all the same thing. If one sort's good the other is."

Biddy walked along a moment. "Is she serious? Is she conscientious?"

"Oh, she has the makings of a great artist," said Peter.

"I'm glad to hear you think a woman can be one."

"In that line there has never been any doubt about it."

"And only in that line?"

"I mean on the stage in general, dramatic or lyric. It's as the actress that the woman produces the most complete and satisfactory artistic results."

"And only as the actress?"

"Yes, there's another art in which she's not bad."

"Which one do you mean?" asked Biddy.

"That of being charming and good, and indispensable to man."

"Oh, that is n't an art."

"Then you leave her only the stage. Take it, if you like, in the widest sense."

Biddy appeared to reflect a moment, as if to see in what sense this might be. But she found none that was wide enough, for she cried the next minute: "Do you mean to say there 's nothing for a woman but to be an actress?"

"Never in my life. I only say that that 's the best thing for a woman to be who finds herself irresistibly carried into the practice of the arts; for there her capacity for them has most application and her incapacity for them least. But at the same time I strongly recommend her not to be an artist if she can possibly help it. It 's a devil of a life."

"Oh, I know; men want women not to be anything."

"It 's a poor little refuge they try to take from the overwhelming consciousness that you are, in fact, everything."

"Everything? That 's the kind of thing you say to keep us quiet."

"Dear Biddy, you see how well we succeed!" laughed Sherringham; to which the girl responded by inquiring irrelevantly:

"Why is it so necessary for you to go to the theatre to-night, if Miss Rooth does n't want you to?"

"My dear child, she does. But that has nothing to do with it."

"Why then did she say that she does n't?"

"Oh, because she meant just the contrary."

"Is she so false, then — is she so vulgar?"

"She speaks a special language; practically it is n't false, because it renders her thought, and those who know her understand it."

"But she does n't use it only to those who know her, since she asked me, who have so little the honor of her acquaintance, to keep you away to-night. How am I to know that she meant by that that I 'm to urge you on to go?"

Sherringham was on the point of replying, "Because you have my word for it;" but he shrank, in fact, from giving his word — he had some fine scruples — and endeavored to get out of his embarrassment by a general tribute. "Dear Biddy, you 're delightfully acute: you 're quite as clever as Miss Rooth." He felt, however, that this was scarcely adequate, and he continued: "The truth is, its being important for me to go is a matter quite independent of that young lady's wishing it or not wishing it. There happens to be a definite, intrinsic propriety in it which determines the matter, and which it would take me long to explain."

"I see. But fancy your 'explaining' to me: you make me feel so indiscreet!" the girl cried quickly — an exclamation which touched him because he was not aware that, quick as it had been, Biddy had still had time to be struck first (though she would n't for the world have ex-

pressed it) with the oddity of such a duty at such a time. In fact, that oddity, during a silence of some minutes, came back to Peter himself: the note had been forced — it sounded almost ignobly frivolous, for a man on the eve of proceeding to a high diplomatic post. The effect of this, however, was not to make him break out with: "Hang it, I *will* keep my engagement to your mother!" but to fill him with the wish that he could shorten his actual excursion by taking Biddy the rest of the way in a cab. He was uncomfortable, and there were hansoms about which he looked at wistfully. While he was so occupied his companion took up the talk by an abrupt interrogation.

"Why did she say that Nick ought n't to have resigned his seat?"

"Oh, I don't know; it struck her so. It does n't matter much."

"If she 's an artist herself why does n't she like people to go in for art, especially when Nick has given his time to painting her so beautifully? Why does she come there so often, if she disapproves of what he has done?"

"Oh, Miriam's disapproval — it does n't count; it 's a manner of speaking."

"Of speaking untruths, do you mean? Does she think just the reverse — is that the way she talks about everything?"

"We always admire most what we can do least," Peter replied; and Miriam of course is n't

political. She ranks painters more or less with her own profession, about which, already, new as she is to it, she has no illusions. They 're all artists; it 's the same general sort of thing. She prefers men of the world — men of action."

"Is that the reason she likes you?" Biddy mocked.

"Ah, she does n't like me — could n't you see it?"

Biddy said nothing for a moment; then she asked: "Is that why she lets you call her 'Miriam'?"

"Oh, I don't, to her face."

"Ah, only to mine!" laughed Biddy.

"One says that as one says 'Rachel' of her great predecessor."

"Except that she is n't so great, quite yet, is she?"

"Far from it; she 's the freshest of novices — she has scarcely been four months on the stage. But no novice has ever been such an adept. She 'll go very fast, and I dare say that before long she 'll be magnificent."

"What a pity you 'll not see that!" Biddy remarked, after a short interval.

"Not see it?"

"If you 're thousands of miles away."

"It *is* a pity," Peter said; "and since you mention it I don't mind frankly telling you — throwing myself on your mercy, as it were — that that 's why I make such a point of a rare occa-

sion like to-night. I 've a weakness for the drama that, as you perhaps know, I 've never concealed, and this impression will probably have to last me, in some barren spot, for many, many years."

"I understand — I understand. I hope, therefore, it will be charming." And Biddy walked faster.

"Just as some other charming impressions will have to last," Peter added, conscious of a certain effort that he was obliged to make to keep up with her. She seemed almost to be running away from him, a circumstance which led him to suggest, after they had proceeded a little further without more words, that if she were in a hurry they had perhaps better take a cab. Her face was strange and touching to him as she turned it to reply quickly:

"Oh, I'm not in the least in a hurry, and I think, really, I had better walk."

"We'll walk, then, by all means!" Peter declared, with slightly exaggerated gayety; in pursuance of which they went on a hundred yards. Biddy kept the same pace; yet it was scarcely a surprise to Sherringham that she should suddenly stop, with the exclamation:

"After all, though I'm not in a hurry I'm tired! I had better have a cab; please call that one," she added, looking about her.

They were in a straight, blank, ugly street, where the small, cheap, gray-faced houses had no expression save that of a rueful inconsolable con-

sciousness of its want of identity. They would have constituted a "terrace" if they could, but they had given it up. Even a hansom which loitered across the end of the vista turned a skeptical back upon it, so that Sherringham had to lift his voice in a loud appeal. He stood with Biddy watching the cab approach them. "This is one of the charming things you'll remember," she said, turning her eyes to the general dreariness from the particular figure of the vehicle, which was antiquated and clumsy. Before he could reply she had lightly stepped into the cab; but as he answered, "Most assuredly it is," and prepared to follow her, she quickly closed the apron.

"I must go alone; you've lots of things to do — it's all right;" and, through the aperture in the roof, she gave the driver her address. She had spoken with decision, and Peter recognized that she wished to get away from him. Her eyes betrayed it, as well as her voice, in a look — not a hard one, however — which as he stood there with his hand on the cab he had time to take from her. "Good-by, Peter," she smiled; and as the cab began to rumble away he uttered the same tepid, ridiculous farewell.

XLIV.

When Miriam and her mother went into the studio Nick Dormer had stopped whistling, but he was still gay enough to receive them with every demonstration of sociability. He thought his studio a poor place, ungarnished, untapestried, a bare, almost grim workshop, with all its revelations and honors still to come. But both his visitors smiled upon it a good deal in the same way in which they had smiled on Bridget Dormer when they met her at the door: Mrs. Rooth because vague, prudent approbation was the habit of her foolish little face — it was ever the least danger; and Miriam because apparently she was genuinely glad to find herself within the walls which she spoke of now as her asylum. She broke out in this strain to her host almost as soon as she had crossed the threshold, commending his circumstances, his conditions of work, as infinitely happier than her own. He was quiet, independent, absolute, free to do what he liked as he liked it, shut up in his little temple with his altar and his divinity; not hustled about in a mob of people, having to posture and grin to pit and gallery, to square himself at every step with insufferable conventions and with the ignorance and vanity of others. He was blissfully alone.

"Mercy, how you do abuse your fine profession! I'm sure I never urged you to adopt it!" Mrs. Rooth cried, in real bewilderment, to her daughter.

"She was abusing mine still more, the other day," joked Nick — "telling me I ought to be ashamed of it and of myself."

"Oh, I never know from one moment to the other — I live with my heart in my mouth," sighed the old woman.

"Are n't you quiet about the great thing — about my behavior?" Miriam smiled. "My only extravagances are intellectual."

"I don't know what you call your behavior."

"You would very soon, if it were not what it is."

"And I don't know what you call intellectual," grumbled Mrs. Rooth.

"Yes, but I don't see very well how I could make you understand that. At any rate," Miriam went on, looking at Nick, "I retract what I said the other day about Mr. Dormer. I've no wish to quarrel with him about the way he has determined to dispose of his life, because after all it does suit me very well. It rests me, this little devoted corner; oh, it rests me. It 's out of the tussle and the heat, it 's deliciously still, and they can't get at me. Ah, when art 's like this, *à la bonne heure!*" And she looked round on such a presentment of "art" with a splendid air that made Nick burst out laughing at its contrast with

the humble fact. Miriam smiled at him as if she liked to be the cause of his mirth, and went on appealing to him: "You 'll always let me come here for an hour, won't you, to take breath — to let the whirlwind pass? You need n't trouble yourself about me; I don't mean to impose on you in the least the necessity of painting me, though if that 's a manner of helping you to get on you may be sure it will always be open to you. Do what you like with me in that respect; only let me sit here on a high stool, keeping well out of your way, and see what you happen to be doing. I 'll tell you my own adventures when you want to hear them."

"The fewer adventures you have to tell, the better, my dear," said Mrs. Rooth; "and if Mr. Dormer keeps you quiet he will add ten years to my life."

"This is an interesting comment on Mr. Dormer's own quietus, on his independence and sweet solitude," Nick observed. "Miss Rooth has to work with others, which is, after all, only what Mr. Dormer has to do when he works with Miss Rooth. What do you make of the inevitable sitter?"

"Oh," answered Miriam, "you can say to the sitter, 'Hold your tongue, you brute!'"

"Is n't it a good deal in that manner that I 've heard you address your comrades at the theatre?" asked Mrs. Rooth. "That 's why my heart 's in my mouth."

"Yes, but they hit me back; they reply to me — *comme de raison* — as I should never think of replying to Mr. Dormer. It 's a great advantage to him that when he 's peremptory with his model it only makes her better, adds to her expression of gloomy grandeur."

"We did the gloomy grandeur in the other picture: suppose, therefore, we try something different in this," suggested Nick.

"It *is* serious, it *is* grand," murmured Mrs. Rooth, who had taken up a rapt attitude before the portrait of her daughter. "It makes one wonder what she 's thinking of. Beautiful, commendable things — that 's what it seems to say."

"What can I be thinking of but the tremendous wisdom of my mother?" Miriam inquired. "I brought her this morning to see that thing — she had only seen it in its earliest stage — and not to presume to advise you about anything else you may be so good as to embark on. She wanted, or she professed that she wanted, terribly to know what you had finally arrived at. She was too impatient to wait till you should send it home."

"Ah, send it home — send it home; let us have it always with us!" Mrs. Rooth urged. "It will hold us up; it will keep us on the heights, near the stars — be always, for us, a symbol and a reminder!"

"You see I was right," Miriam went on; "for she appreciates thoroughly, in her own way, and

understands. But if she worries or distracts you I 'll send her directly home — I 've kept the carriage there on purpose. I must add that I don't feel quite safe to-day in letting her out of my sight. She is liable to make dashes at the theatre and play unconscionable tricks there. I shall never again accuse mamma of a want of interest in my profession. Her interest to-day exceeds even my own. She 's all over the place, and she has ideas; ah, but ideas! She 's capable of turning up at the theatre at five o'clock this afternoon and demanding that the scenery of the third act be repainted. For myself, I 've not a word more to say on the subject — I 've accepted the situation. Everything is no doubt wrong; but nothing can possibly be right. Let us eat and drink, for to-night we die. If you like, mamma shall go and sit in the carriage, and as there is no means of fastening the doors (is there?) your servant shall keep guard over her."

"Just as you are now — be so good as to remain so; sitting just that way — leaning back, with a smile in your eyes and one hand on the sofa beside you, supporting you a little. I shall stick a flower into the other hand — let it lie in your lap, just as it is. Keep that thing on your head — it 's admirably uncovered: do you call the construction a bonnet? — and let your head fall back a little. There it is — it 's found. This time I shall really do something, and it will be as different as you like from that crazy job. *Pazi-*

enea!" It was in these irrelevant but earnest words that Nick responded to his sitter's uttered vagaries, of which her charming tone and countenance diminished the superficial acerbity. He held up his hands a moment, to fix her in her limits, and a few minutes afterwards had a happy sense of having begun to work.

"The smile in her eyes — don't forget the smile in her eyes!" Mrs. Rooth exclaimed softly, turning away and creeping about the room. "That will make it so different from the other picture and show the two sides of her genius, with the wonderful range between them. It will be a magnificent pendant; and though I dare say I shall strike you as greedy, you must let me hope you will send it home too."

Mrs. Rooth explored the place discreetly, on tiptoe, gossiping as she went and bending her head and her eyeglass over various objects with an air of imperfect comprehension which did not prevent Nick from being reminded of the story of her underhand commercial habits told by Gabriel Nash at the exhibition in Paris, the first time her name had fallen on his ear. A queer old woman from whom, if you approached her in the right way, you could buy old pots — it was in this character that she had originally been introduced to him. He had lost sight of it afterwards, but it revived again as his observant eyes, at the same time that they followed his active hand, became aware of her instinctive appraising

gestures. There was a moment when he laughed out gayly — there was so little in his poor studio to appraise. Mrs. Rooth's vague, polite, disappointed bent back and head made a subject, the subject of a sketch, in an instant: they gave such a sudden pictorial glimpse of the element of race. He found himself seeing the immemorial Jewess in her, holding up a candle in a crammed back-shop. There was no candle, indeed, and his studio was not crammed, and it had never occurred to him before that she was of Hebrew strain, except on the general theory, held with pertinacity by several clever people, that most of us are more or less so. The late Rudolf Roth had been, and his daughter was visibly her father's child; so that, flanked by such a pair, good Semitic reasons were surely not wanting to the mother. Receiving Miriam's little satiric shower without shaking her shoulders, she might at any rate have been the descendant of a tribe long persecuted. Her blandness was imperturbable, and she professed that she would be as still as a mouse. Miriam, on the other side of the room, in the tranquil beauty of her attitude (it was "found" indeed, as Nick had said), watched her a little and then exclaimed that she wished she had locked her up at home. Putting aside her humorous account of the dangers to which she was exposed from her mother, it was not whimsical to imagine that, within the limits of that repose from which the Neville-Nugents

never wholly departed, Mrs. Rooth might indeed be a trifle fidgety and have something on her mind. Nick presently mentioned that it would not be possible for him to "send home" this second performance; and he added, in the exuberance of having already got a little into relation with his work, that perhaps that did n't matter, inasmuch as — if Miriam would give him his time, to say nothing of her own — a third masterpiece might also, some day, very well come off. His model rose to this without conditions, assuring him that he might count upon her till she grew too old and too ugly, and that nothing would make her so happy as that he should paint her as often as Romney had painted the celebrated Lady Hamilton. "Ah, Lady Hamilton!" deprecated Mrs. Rooth; while Miriam, who had on occasion the candor of a fine acquisitiveness, inquired what particular reason there might be for his not letting them have the picture he was now beginning.

"Why, I 've promised it to Peter Sherringham — he has offered me money for it," Nick replied. "However, he 's welcome to it for nothing, poor fellow, and I shall be delighted to do the best I can for him."

Mrs. Rooth, still prowling, stopped in the middle of the room at this, and Miriam exclaimed: "He offered you money — just as we came in?"

"You met him, then, at the door, with my sister? I supposed you had — he 's taking her home," said Nick.

"Your sister 's a lovely girl — such an aristocratic type!" breathed Mrs. Rooth. Then she added: "I've a tremendous confession to make to you."

"Mamma's confessions have to be tremendous to correspond with her crimes," said Miriam. "She asked Miss Dormer to come and see us — suggested even that you might bring her some Sunday. I don't like the way mamma does such things — too much humility, too many *simagrées*, after all; but I also said what I could to be nice to her. Your sister *is* charming — awfully pretty and modest. If you were to press me I should tell you frankly that it seems to me rather a social muddle, this rubbing shoulders of 'nice girls' and *filles de théâtre:* I should n't think it would do your young ladies much good. However, it 's their own affair, and no doubt there 's no more need of their thinking we 're worse than we are than of their thinking we 're better. The people they live with don't seem to know the difference — I sometimes make my reflections about the public one works for."

"Ah, if you go in for the public's knowing differences, you 're far too particular," Nick laughed. "*D'où tombez-vous?* as you affected French people say. If you have anything at stake on that, you had simply better not play."

"Dear Mr. Dormer, don't encourage her to be so dreadful; for it *is* dreadful, the way she talks," Mrs. Rooth broke in. "One would think we

were not respectable — one would think I had never known what I have known and been what I have been."

"What one would think, beloved mother, is that you are a still greater humbug than you are. It 's you, on the contrary, that go down on your knees, that pour forth apologies about our being vagabonds."

"Vagabonds — listen to her! — after the education I 've given her and our magnificent prospects!" wailed Mrs. Rooth, sinking, with clasped hands, upon the nearest ottoman.

"Not after our prospects, if prospects they are: a good deal before them. Yes, you 've taught me tongues, and I 'm greatly obliged to you — they no doubt impart variety, as well as incoherency, to my conversation; and that of people in our line is for the most part notoriously monotonous and shoppy. The gift of tongues is, in general, the sign of your genuine adventurer. Dear mamma, I 've no low standard — that 's the last thing," Miriam went on. "My weakness is my exalted conception of respectability. Ah, *parlez-moi de ça* and of the way I understand it! Oh, if I were to go in for being respectable you 'd see something fine. I 'm awfully conservative and I know what respectability is, even when I meet people of society on the accidental middle ground of glowering or smirking. I know also what it is n't — it is n't the sweet union of little girls and actresses. I should carry it much fur-

ther than any of these people: I should never look at the likes of us! Every hour I live I see that the wisdom of the ages was in the experience of dear old Madame Carré — was in a hundred things she told me. She 's founded on a rock. After that," Miriam went on, to her host, "I can assure you that if you were so good as to bring Miss Dormer to see us we should be angelically careful of her and surround her with every attention and precaution."

"The likes of us — the likes of us!" Mrs. Rooth repeated plaintively, with ineffectual, theoretical resentment. "I don't know what you are talking about, and I decline to be turned upside down. I have my ideas as well as you, and I repudiate the charge of false humility. I 've been through too many troubles to be proud, and a pleasant, polite manner was the rule of my life even in the days when, God knows, I had everything. I 've never changed, and if with God's help I had a civil tongue then, I have a civil tongue now. It 's more than you always have, my poor perverse and passionate child. Once a lady always a lady — all the footlights in the world, turn them up as high as you will, won't make a difference. And I think people know it, people who know anything (if I may use such an expression), and it 's because they know it that I 'm not afraid to address them courteously. And I must say — and I call Mr. Dormer to witness, for if he could reason with you a bit about it he might render

several people a service — your conduct to Mr. Sherringham simply breaks my heart," Mrs. Rooth concluded, with a jump of several steps in the fine modern avenue of her argument.

Nick was appealed to, but he hesitated a moment, and while he hesitated Miriam remarked, "Mother's good — mother's very good; but it is only little by little that you discover how good she is." This seemed to leave Nick free to ask Mrs. Rooth, with the preliminary intimation that what she had just said was very striking, what she meant by her daughter's conduct to Peter Sherringham. Before Mrs. Rooth could answer this question, however, Miriam interposed, irrelevantly, with one of her own. "Do you mind telling me if you made your sister go off with Mr. Sherringham because you knew it was about time for me to turn up? Poor Mr. Dormer, I get you into trouble, don't I?" she added sympathetically.

"Into trouble?" echoed Nick, looking at her head but not at her eyes.

"Well, we won't talk about that!" Miriam exclaimed, with a rich laugh.

Nick now hastened to say that he had nothing to do with his sister's leaving the studio — she had only come, as it happened, for a moment. She had walked away with Peter Sherringham because they were cousins and old friends: he was to leave England immediately, for a long time, and he had offered her his company going

home. Mrs. Rooth shook her head very knowingly over the "long time" that Mr. Sherringham would be absent — she plainly had her ideas about that; and she conscientiously related that in the course of the short conversation they had all had at the door of the house her daughter had reminded Miss Dormer of something that had passed between them, in Paris, in regard to the charming young lady's modeling her head.

"I did it to make the question of our meeting less absurd — to put it on the footing of our both being artists. I don't ask you if she has talent," said Miriam.

"Then I need n't tell you," answered Nick.

"I 'm sure she has talent and a very refined inspiration. I see something in that corner, covered with a mysterious veil," Mrs. Rooth insinuated; which led Miriam to ask immediately:

"Has she been trying her hand at Mr. Sherringham?"

"When should she try her hand, poor dear young lady? He 's always sitting with us," said Mrs. Rooth.

"Dear mamma, you exaggerate. He has his moments, when he seems to say his prayers to me; but we 've had some success in cutting them down. *Il s'est bien détaché ces-jours-ci*, and I 'm very happy for him. Of course it 's an impertinent allusion for me to make; but I should be so delighted if I could think of him as a little in love with Miss Dormer," the girl pursued, addressing Nick.

"He is, I think, just a little — just a tiny bit," said Nick, working away; while Mrs. Rooth ejaculated, to her daughter, simultaneously:

"How can you ask such fantastic questions when you know that he 's dying for you?"

"Oh, dying! — he 's dying very hard!" cried Miriam. "Mr. Sherringham 's a man of whom I can't speak with too much esteem and affection, who may be destined to perish by some horrid fever (which God forbid!) in the unpleasant country he 's going to. But he won't have caught his fever from your humble servant."

"You may kill him even while you remain in perfect health yourself," said Nick; "and since we 're talking of the matter I don't see the harm in my confessing that he strikes me as bad — oh, as very bad indeed."

"And yet he 's in love with your sister? — *je n'y suis plus.*"

"He tries to be, for he sees that as regards you there are difficulties. He would like to put his hand on some nice girl who would be an antidote to his poison."

"Difficulties are a mild name for them; poison, even, is a mild name for the ill he suffers from. The principal difficulty is that he does n't know what he wants. The next is that I don't either — or what I want myself. I only know what I don't want," said Miriam brightly, as if she were uttering some happy, beneficent truth. "I don't want a person who takes things even less simply

than I do myself. Mr. Sherringham, poor man, must be very uncomfortable, for one side of him is perpetually fighting against the other side. He 's trying to serve God and Mammon, and I don't know how God will come off. What I like in you is that you have definitely let Mammon go — it 's the only way. That 's my earnest conviction, and yet they call us people light. Poor Mr. Sherringham has tremendous ambitions — tremendous *riguardi*, as we used to say in Italy. He wants to enjoy every comfort and to save every appearance, and all without making a sacrifice. He expects others — me, for instance — to make all the sacrifices. *Merci*, much as I esteem him and much as I owe him! I don't know how he ever came to stray, at all, into our bold, bad Bohemia: it was a cruel trick for fortune to play him. He can't keep out of it, he 's perpetually making dashes across the border, and yet he 's not in the least at home there. There 's another in whose position (if I were in it) I would n't look at the likes of us!"

"I don't know much about the matter, but I have an idea Peter thinks he has made, or at least is making, sacrifices."

"So much the better — you must encourage him, you must help him."

"I don't know what my daughter 's talking about — she is much too clever for me," Mrs. Rooth put in. "But there 's one way you can encourage Mr. Sherringham — there 's one way

you can help him; and perhaps it won't make it any worse for a gentleman of your good nature that it will help me at the same time. Can't I look to you, dear Mr. Dormer, to see that he does come to the theatre to-night — that he does n't feel himself obliged to stay away?"

"What danger is there of his staying away?" Nick asked.

"If he 's bent on sacrifices, that 's a very good one to begin with," Miriam observed.

"That 's the mad, bad way she talks to him — she has forbidden the dear unhappy gentleman the house!" her mother cried. "She brought it up to him just now, at the door, before Miss Dormer: such very odd form! She pretends to impose her commands upon him."

"Oh, he 'll be there — we 're going to dine together," said Nick. And when Miriam asked him what that had to do with it he went on: "Why, we 've arranged it; I 'm going, and he won't let me go alone."

"You 're going? I sent you no places," Miriam objected.

"Yes, but I 've got one. Why did n't you, after all I 've done for you?"

She hesitated a moment. "Because I 'm so good. No matter," she added: "if Mr. Sherringham comes I won't act."

"Won't you act for me?"

"She 'll act like an angel," Mrs. Rooth protested. "She might do, she might be, any-

thing in the world; but she won't take common pains."

"Of one thing there's no doubt," said Miriam: "that compared with the rest of us — poor passionless creatures — mamma does know what she wants."

"And what is that?" inquired Nick, chalking away.

"She wants everything."

"Never, never — I'm much more humble," retorted the old woman; upon which her daughter requested her to give then to Mr. Dormer, who was a reasonable man and an excellent judge, a general idea of the scope of her desires.

As, however, Mrs. Rooth, sighing and deprecating, was not quick to comply with the injunction, the girl attempted a short cut to the truth with the abrupt inquiry: "Do you believe for a single moment he'd marry me?"

"Why, he has proposed to you — you've told me, yourself — a dozen times."

"Proposed what to me? I've told you that neither a dozen times nor once, because I've never understood. He has made wonderful speeches, but he has never been serious."

"You told me he had been in the seventh heaven of devotion, especially that night we went to the foyer of the Français," Mrs. Rooth insisted.

"Do you call the seventh heaven of devotion serious? He's in love with me, *je le veux bien;*

he 's so poisoned, as Mr. Dormer vividly says, as to require an antidote; but he has never spoken to me as if he really expected me to listen to him, and he 's the more of a gentleman from that fact. He knows we have n't a common ground — that a grasshopper can't mate with a fish. So he has taken care to say to me only more than he can possibly mean. That makes it just nothing."

"Did he say more than he can possibly mean when he took formal leave of you yesterday — forever and ever?"

"Pray don't you call that a sacrifice?" Nick asked.

"Oh, he took it all back, his sacrifice, before he left the house."

"Then has *that* no meaning?" demanded Mrs. Rooth.

"None that I can make out."

"Oh, I 've no patience with you: you can be stupid when you will as well as clever when you will!" the old woman groaned.

"What mamma wishes me to understand and to practice is the particular way to be clever with Mr. Sherringham," said Miriam. "There are doubtless depths of wisdom and virtue in it. But I can see only one way; namely, to be perfectly honest."

"I like to hear you talk — it makes you live, brings you out," Nick mentioned. "And you sit beautifully still. All *I* want to say is, please

continue to do so; remain exactly as you are — it 's rather important — for the next ten minutes."

"We're washing our dirty linen before you, but it 's all right," Miriam answered, "because it shows you what sort of people we are, and that 's what you need to know. Don't make me vague and arranged and fine, in this new thing," she continued: "make me characteristic and real; make life, with all its horrid facts and truths, stick out of me. I wish you could put mother in too; make us live there side by side and tell our little story. 'The wonderful actress and her still more wonderful mamma' — don't you think that 's an awfully good subject?"

Mrs. Rooth, at this, cried shame on her daughter's wanton humors, professing that she herself would never accept so much from Nick's good-nature, and Miriam settled it that, at any rate, he was some day and in some way to do her mother and sail very near the wind.

"She does n't believe he wants to marry me, any more than you do," the girl, taking up her dispute again after a moment, represented to Nick; "but she believes — how indeed can I tell you what she believes? that I can work it (that 's about it), so that in the fullness of time I shall hold him in a vise. I 'm to keep him along for the present, but not to listen to him, for if I listen to him I shall lose him. It 's ingenious, it 's complicated; but I dare say you follow me."

"Don't move — don't move," said Nick. "Excuse a beginner."

"No, I shall explain quietly. Somehow (here it's *very* complicated and you must n't lose the thread), I shall be an actress and make a tremendous lot of money, and somehow, too (I suppose a little later), I shall become an ambassadress and be the favorite of courts. So you see it will all be delightful. Only I shall have to go straight. Mamma reminds me of a story I once heard about the mother of a young lady who was in receipt of much civility from the pretender to a crown, which indeed he, and the young lady too, afterwards more or less wore. The old countess watched the course of events and gave her daughter the cleverest advice: '*Tiens bon, ma fille*, and you shall sit upon a throne.' Mamma wishes me to *tenir bon* (she apparently thinks there's a danger I may not), so that if I don't sit upon a throne I shall at least parade at the foot of one. And if before that, for ten years, I pile up the money, they'll forgive me the way I've made it. I should hope so, if I've *tenu bon!* Only, ten years is a good while to hold out, is n't it? If it is n't Mr. Sherringham it will be some one else. Mr. Sherringham has the great merit of being a bird in the hand. I'm to keep him along, I'm to be still more diplomatic than even he can be."

Mrs. Rooth listened to her daughter with an air of assumed reprobation which melted, before

the girl had done, into a diverted, complacent smile — the gratification of finding herself the proprietress of so much wit and irony and grace. Miriam's account of her mother's views was a scene of comedy, and there was instinctive art in the way she added touch to touch and made point upon point. She was so quiet, to oblige her painter, that only her fine lips moved — all her expression was in their charming utterance. Mrs. Rooth, after the first flutter of a less cynical spirit, consented to be sacrificed to an effect of an order she had now been educated to recognize; so that she hesitated only for a moment, when Miriam had ceased speaking, before she broke out, endearingly, with a little titter and "*Comédienne!*" She looked at Nick Dormer as if to say: "Ain't she fascinating? That's the way she does for you!"

"It 's rather cruel, is n't it," said Miriam, "to deprive people of the luxury of calling one an actress as they 'd call one a liar? I represent, but I represent truly."

"Mr. Sherringham would marry you to-morrow — there 's no question of ten years!" cried Mrs. Rooth, with a comicality of plainness.

Miriam smiled at Nick, appealing for a sort of pity for her mother. "Is n't it droll, the way she can't get it out of her head?" Then, turning, almost coaxingly, to the old woman, "*Voyons*, look about you: they don't marry us like that."

"But they do — *cela se voit tous les jours.* Ask Mr. Dormer."

"Oh, never!" said Miriam: "it would be as if I asked him to give us a practical illustration."

"I shall never give any illustration of matrimony; for me that question 's over," said Nick.

Miriam rested kind eyes on him. "Dear me, how you must hate me!" And before he had time to reply she went on, to her mother: "People marry them to make them leave the stage; which proves exactly what I say."

"Ah, they offer them the finest positions," reasoned Mrs. Rooth.

"Do you want me to leave it, then?"

"Oh, you can manage, if you will!"

"The only managing I know anything about is to do my work. If I manage that, I shall pull through."

"But, dearest, may our work not be of many sorts?"

"I only know one," said Miriam.

At this Mrs. Rooth got up with a sigh. "I see you do wish to drive me into the street."

"Mamma 's bewildered — there are so many paths she wants to follow, there are so many bundles of hay. As I told you, she wishes to gobble them all," Miriam went on. Then she added: "Yes, go and take the carriage; take a turn round the Park — you always delight in that — and come back for me in an hour."

"I 'm too vexed with you; the air will do me good," said Mrs. Rooth. But before she went she added, to Nick: "I have your assurance that you will bring him, then, to-night?"

"Bring Peter? I don't think I shall have to drag him," said Nick. "But you must do me the justice to remember that if I should resort to force I should do something that 's not particularly in my interest — I should be magnanimous."

"We must always be that, must n't we?" moralized Mrs. Rooth.

"How could it affect your interest?" Miriam inquired, less abstractly, of Nick.

"Yes, as you say," her mother reminded him, "the question of marriage has ceased to exist for you."

"Mamma goes straight at it!" laughed the girl, getting up, while Nick rubbed his canvas before answering. Miriam went to Mrs. Rooth and settled her bonnet and mantle in preparation for her drive; then stood for a moment with a filial arm about her, as if they were waiting for their host's explanation. This, however, when it came, halted visibly.

"Why, you said awhile ago that if Peter was there you would n't act."

"I 'll act for *him*," smiled Miriam, encircling her mother.

"It does n't matter whom it 's for!" Mrs. Rooth declared sagaciously.

"Take your drive and relax your mind," said

the girl, kissing her. "Come for me in an hour; not later, but not sooner." She went with her to the door, bundled her out, closed it behind her and came back to the position she had quitted. "*This* is the peace I want!" she exclaimed, with relief, as she settled into it.

XLV.

PETER SHERRINGHAM said so little during the performance that his companion was struck by his dumbness, especially as Miriam's acting seemed to Nick Dormer magnificent. He held his breath while she was on the stage — she gave the whole thing, including the spectator's emotion, such a lift. She had not carried out her fantastic menace of not exerting herself, and, as Mrs. Rooth had said, it little mattered for whom she acted. Nick was conscious, as he watched her, that she went through it all for herself, for the idea that possessed her and that she rendered with extraordinary breadth. She could not open the door a part of the way to it and let it simply peep in; if it entered at all it must enter in full procession and occupy the premises in state.

This was what had happened on an occasion which, as Nick noted in his stall, grew larger with each throb of the responsive house; till by the time the play was half over it appeared to stretch out wide arms to the future. Nick had often heard more applause, but he had never heard more attention; for they were all charmed and hushed together and success seemed to be sitting down with them. There had been, of course,

plenty of announcement — the newspapers had abounded and the arts of the manager had taken the freest license; but it was easy to feel a fine universal consensus and to recognize the intrinsic buoyancy of the evening. People snatched their eyes from the stage for an instant, to look at each other, and a sense of intelligence deepened and spread. It was a part of the impression that the actress was only now really showing, for this time she had verse to deal with and she made it unexpectedly exquisite. She was beauty, she was music, she was truth; she was passion and persuasion and tenderness. She caught up the obstreperous play in soothing, entwining arms and carried it into the high places of poetry, of style. And she had such tones of nature, such concealments of art, such effusions of life, that the whole scene glowed with the color she communicated, and the house, as if pervaded with rosy fire, glowed back at the scene. Nick looked round in the intervals; he felt excited and flushed — the night had turned into a feast of fraternity and he expected to see people embrace each other. The crowd, the flutter, the triumph, the surprise, the signals and rumors, the heated air, his associates, near him, pointing out other figures, who presumably were celebrated but whom he had never heard of, all amused him and banished every impulse of criticism. Miriam was as satisfactory as some right sensation — she would feed the memory with the ineffaceable.

One of the things that amused Nick, or at least helped to fill his attention, was Peter's attitude, which apparently did not exclude criticism; rather indeed mainly implied it. Sherringham never took his eyes off the actress, but he made no remark about her and he never stirred out of his chair. Nick had, from the first, a plan of going round to speak to her, but as his companion evidently meant not to move he had a delicacy in regard to being more forward. During their brief dinner together (they made a rigid point of not being late), Peter had been silent and irremediably serious, but also, his kinsman judged, full of the wish to make it plain that he was calm. In his seat he was calmer than ever; had an air even of trying to suggest to Nick that his attendance, preoccupied as he was with deeper solemnities, was slightly mechanical, the result of a conception of duty, a habit of courtesy. When, during a scene in the second act — a scene from which Miriam was absent — Nick observed to him that, from his inexpressiveness, one might gather he was not pleased, he replied after a moment: "I 've been looking for her mistakes." And when Nick rejoined to this that he certainly would n't find them, he said again, in an odd tone: "No, I sha'n't find them — I sha'n't find them." It might have seemed that since the girl's performance was a dazzling success he regarded his evening as rather a failure.

After the third act Nick said candidly: "My

dear fellow, how can you sit here? Aren't you going to speak to her?"

To which Peter replied inscrutably: "Lord, no, never again; I bade her good-by yesterday. She knows what I think of her form. It's very good, but she carries it a little too far. Besides, she didn't want me to come, and it's therefore more discreet to keep away from her."

"Surely it is n't an hour for discretion!" cried Nick. "Excuse me, at any rate, for five minutes."

He went behind and reappeared only as the curtain was rising on the fourth act; and in the interval between the fourth and the fifth he went again for a shorter time. Peter was personally detached, but he consented to listen to his companion's vivid account of the state of things on the stage, where the elation of victory had made every one merry. The strain was over, the ship was in port, and they were all wiping their faces and grinning. Miriam — yes, positively — was grinning too, and she had n't asked a question about Peter nor sent him a message. They were kissing all round and dancing for joy. They were on the eve, worse luck, of a tremendous run. Peter groaned, irrepressibly, at this; it was, save for a slight manifestation a moment later, the only sign of emotion that Nick's report elicited from him. There was but one voice of regret that they had n't put on the piece earlier, as the end of the season would interrupt the run.

There was but one voice, too, about the fourth act — it was believed that all London would rush to see the fourth act. There was a wonderful lot of people, and Miriam was charming; she was receiving there, in the ugly place, like a kind of royalty, with a smile and a word for each. She was like a young queen on her accession. When she saw him, Nick, she had kissed her hand to him, over the heads of the courtiers. Nick's artless comment on this was that she had such pretty manners. It made Sherringham laugh, apparently at his companion's conception of the manners of a young queen. Mrs. Rooth, with a dozen shawls on her arm, was as red as a turkey; but you could n't tell whether Miriam was red or pale: she was so cleverly, awfully cleverly, painted — perhaps a little too much. Dashwood, of course, was greatly to the fore, but you did n't have to mention his own performance to him: he was magnanimous and would use nothing but the feminine pronoun. He did n't say much, indeed, but he evidently had ideas; he nodded significant things and whistled inimitable sounds — "Heuh, heuh!" He was perfectly satisfied; moreover he looked further ahead than any one.

It was on coming back to his place after the fourth act that Nick put in, for Sherringham's benefit, most of these touches in his sketch of the situation. If Peter had continued to look for Miriam's mistakes he had not yet found them:

the fourth act, bristling with dangers, putting a premium on every sort of cheap effect, had rounded itself without a flaw. Sitting there alone, while Nick was away, he had leisure to meditate on the wonder of this — on the art with which the girl had separated passion from violence, filling the whole place and never screaming; for it had seemed to him, in London, sometimes, of old, that the yell of theatrical emotion rang through the shrinking night like a fatal warning. Miriam had never been more present to him than at this hour; but she was inextricably transmuted — present essentially as the romantic heroine she represented. His state of mind was of the strangest, and he was conscious of its strangeness; just as he was conscious, in his person, of a cessation of resistance which identified itself absurdly with liberation. He felt weak at the same time that he felt excited, and he felt excited at the same time that he knew, or believed he knew, that his face was a blank. He saw things as a shining confusion, and yet somehow something monstrously definite kept surging out of them. Miriam was a beautiful, actual, fictive, impossible young woman, of a past age and undiscoverable country, who spoke in blank verse and overflowed with metaphor, who was exalted and heroic beyond all human convenience, and who yet was irresistibly real and related to one's own affairs. But that reality was a part of her spectator's joy, and she

was not changed back to the common by his perception of the magnificent trick of art with which it was connected. Before Nick Dormer rejoined him Sherringham, taking a visiting-card from his pocket, wrote on it in pencil a few words in a foreign tongue; but as at that moment he saw Nick coming in he immediately put it out of view.

The last thing before the curtain rose on the fifth act Nick mentioned that he had brought him a message from Basil Dashwood, who hoped they both, on leaving the theatre, would come to supper with him, in company with Miriam and her mother and several others: he had prepared a little informal banquet in honor of so famous a night. At this, while the curtain was rising, Peter immediately took out his card again and added something — he wrote the finest small hand you could see. Nick asked him what he was doing, and after an hesitation he replied:

"It's a word to say I can't come."

"To Dashwood? Oh, I shall go," said Nick.

"Well, I hope you'll enjoy it!" his companion replied, in a tone which came back to him afterwards.

When the curtain fell on the last act, the people stayed, standing up in their places for the most part. The applause shook the house — the recall became a clamor, the relief from a long tension. This was a moment, in any performance, that Sherringham detested, but he stood

for an instant beside Nick, who clapped like a school-boy. There was a veritable roar, and the curtain drew back at the side most removed from them. Sherringham could see that Basil Dashwood was holding it, making a passage for the male "juvenile lead," who had Miriam in tow. Nick redoubled his efforts; heard the plaudits swell; saw the bows of the leading gentleman, who was hot and fat; saw Miriam, personally conducted and closer to the footlights, grow brighter and bigger and more swaying; and then became aware that Sherringham had, with extreme agility, slipped out of the stalls. Nick had already lost sight of him — he had apparently taken but a minute to escape from the house. Nick wondered at his quitting him without a farewell, if he was to leave England on the morrow and they were not to meet at the hospitable Dashwood's. He wondered even what Peter was "up to," since, as he had assured him, there was no question of his going round to Miriam. He waited to see this young lady reappear three times, dragging Dashwood behind her at the second with a friendly arm, to whom, in turn, was hooked Miss Fanny Rover, the actress entrusted, in the piece, with the inevitable comic relief. He went out slowly, with the crowd, and at the door looked again for Peter, who struck him as deficient for once in finish. He could n't know that, in another direction and while he was helping the house to "rise" at

Miriam, his kinsman had been particularly explicit.

On reaching the lobby Sherringham had pounced upon a small boy in buttons, who appeared to be superfluously connected with a desolate refreshment-room and was peeping, on tiptoe, at the stage, through the glazed hole in the door of a box. Into one of the child's hands he thrust the card he had drawn again from his waistcoat, and into the other the largest silver coin he could find in the same receptacle, while he bent over him with words of adjuration — words which the little page tried to help himself to apprehend by instantly attempting to peruse the other words written on the card.

"That 's no use — it 's Italian," said Peter; "only carry it round to Miss Rooth, without a minute's delay. Place it in her hand and she 'll give you some object — a bracelet, a glove or a flower — to bring me back as a sign that she has received it. I shall be outside; bring me there what she gives you, and you shall have another shilling — only fly!"

Sherringham's small messenger sounded him a moment with the sharp face of London wage earning, and still more of London tip-earning, infancy, and vanished as swiftly as a slave of the Arabian Nights. While his patron waited in the lobby the audience began to pour out, and before the urchin had come back to him Peter was clapped on the shoulder by Nick Dormer.

"I 'm glad I have n't lost you," said Nick; "but why did n't you stay to give her a hand?"

"Give her a hand? I hated it."

"My dear fellow, I don't follow you," Nick rejoined. "If you won't come to Dashwood's supper I fear our ways don't lie together."

"Thank him very much; say I have to get up at an unnatural hour." To this Peter added, "I think I ought to tell you she may not be there."

"Miss Rooth? Why, it 's for her."

"I 'm waiting for a word from her — she may change her mind."

Nick stared at his companion. "For you? Why, what have you proposed?"

"I 've proposed marriage," said Peter, in a strange voice.

"I say — !" Nick broke out; and at the same moment Peter's messenger squeezed through the press and stood before him.

"She has given me nothing, sir," the boy announced; "but she says I 'm to say 'All right!'"

Nick marveled a moment. "You 've proposed through *him?*"

"Ay, and she accepts. Good-night!" Peter exclaimed; and, turning away, he bounded into a hansom. He said something to the driver through the roof, and Nick's eyes followed the cab as it started off. Nick was mystified, was even amused; especially when the youth in but-

tons, planted there and wondering too, remarked to him :

"Please, sir, he told me he'd give me a shilling, and he've forgot it."

"Oh, I can't pay you for *that!*" Nick laughed. He was vexed about the supper.

XLVI.

PETER SHERRINGHAM rolled away through the summer night to St. John's Wood. He had put the pressure of strong words upon Miriam, entreating her to drive home immediately, without any one, without even her mother. He wished to see her alone, for a purpose that he would fully and satisfactorily explain — could n't she trust him? He implored her to remember his own situation and throw over her supper, throw over everything. He would wait for her, with unspeakable impatience, in Balaklava Place.

He did so, when he got there, but it took half an hour. Interminable seemed his lonely vigil in Miss Lumley's drawing-room, where the character of the original proprietress came out to him, more than before, in a kind of afterglow of old sociabilities, a vulgar ghostly vibration. The numerous candles had been lighted for him, and Mrs. Rooth's familiar fictions were lying about; but his nerves forbade him the solace of taking a chair and a book. He walked up and down, thinking and listening, and as the long window, the balmy air permitting, stood open into the garden, he passed several times in and out. A carriage appeared to stop at the gate — then there

was nothing; he heard the rare rattle of wheels and the far-off hum of London. His impatience was unreasonable, and though he knew this it persisted; it would have been no easy matter for Miriam to break away from the flock of her felicitators. Still less simple was it doubtless for her to leave poor Dashwood with his supper on his hands. Perhaps she would bring Dashwood with her, to time her; she was capable of playing him — that is, playing Sherringham — or even playing them both, that trick. Perhaps the little wretch in buttons (Peter remembered now the neglected shilling) had only pretended to go round with his card, had come back with an invented answer. But how could he know, since, presumably, he could n't read Italian, that his answer would fit the message? Peter was sorry now that he himself had not gone round, not snatched Miriam bodily away, made sure of her and of what he wanted of her.

When half an hour had elapsed he regarded it as proved that she would n't come, and, asking himself what he should do, determined to drive off again and seize her at Basil Dashwood's feast. Then he remembered Nick had mentioned that this entertainment was not to be held at the young actor's lodgings, but at some tavern or restaurant, the name of which he had not heeded. Suddenly, however, Sherringham became aware with joy that this name did n't matter, for there was something at the garden-door at last. He

rushed out before Miriam had had time to ring, and saw, as she stepped out of the carriage, that she was alone. Now that she was there, that he had this evidence she had listened to him and trusted him, all his impatience and exasperation melted away and a flood of pleading tenderness came out in the first words he spoke to her. It was far "dearer" of her than he had any right to dream, but she was the best and kindest creature — this showed it — as well as the most wonderful. He was really not off his head with his contradictory ways; no, before heaven he was n't, and he would explain, he would make everything clear. Everything was changed.

Miriam stopped short, in the little dusky garden, looking at him in the light of the open window. Then she called back to the coachman — they had left the garden-door open: "Wait for me, mind; I shall want you again."

"What 's the matter — won't you stay?" Peter asked. "Are you going out again at this absurd hour? I won't hurt you," he urged gently. And he went back and closed the garden-door. He wanted to say to the coachman: "It 's no matter; please drive away." At the same time he would n't for the world have done anything offensive to Miriam.

"I 've come because I thought it better to-night, as things have turned out, to do the thing you ask me, whatever it may be. That 's probably what you calculated I would think, eh?

What this evening has been you've seen, and I must allow that your hand's in it. That you know for yourself — that you doubtless felt as you sat there. But I confess I don't imagine what you want of me here, now," Miriam added. She had remained standing in the path.

Peter felt the irony of her "now," and how it made a fool of him, but he had been prepared for it and for much worse. He had begged her not to think him a fool, but in truth, at present, he cared little if she did. Very likely he was, in spite of his plea that everything was changed — he cared little even himself. However, he spoke in the tone of intense reason and of the fullest disposition to satisfy her. This lucidity only took still more from the dignity of his tergiversation: his separation from her the day before had had such pretensions to being lucid. But the explanation, the justification, were in the very fact, and the fact had complete possession of him. He named it when he replied to Miriam: "I've simply overrated my strength."

"Oh, I knew — I knew! That's why I entreated you not to come!" she groaned. She turned away impatiently, and for a moment he thought she would retreat to her carriage. But he passed his hand into her arm, to draw her forward, and after an instant he felt her yield.

"The fact is we must have this thing out," he said. Then he added, as he made her go into the house, bending over her, "The failure of

my strength — that was just the reason of my coming."

She burst out laughing at these words, as she entered the drawing-room, and her laugh made them sound pompous in their false wisdom. She flung off, as a good-natured tribute to the image of their having the thing out, a white shawl that had been wrapped round her. She was still painted and bedizened, in the splendid dress of her fifth act, so that she seemed protected and alienated by the character she had been representing. "Whatever it is you want (when I understand), you 'll be very brief, won't you? Do you know I 've given up a charming supper for you? Mamma has gone there. I 've promised to go back to them."

"You 're an angel not to have let her come with you. I 'm sure she wanted to," said Sherringham.

"Oh, she 's all right, but she 's nervous," Miriam rejoined. Then she added quickly: "Could n't she keep you away, after all?"

"Whom are you talking about?" Biddy Dormer was as absent from Sherringham's mind as if she had never existed.

"The charming girl you were with this morning. Is she so afraid of obliging me? Oh, she 'd be so good for you!"

"Don't speak of that," said Peter, gravely. "I was in perfect good faith yesterday when I took leave of you. I was — I was. But I can't — I can't: you are too unutterably dear to me."

"Oh, don't — please don't," moaned Miriam. She stood before the fireless chimney-piece with one of her hands upon it. "If it 's only to say that, don't you know, what 's the use?"

"It is n't only to say that. I 've a plan, a perfect plan: the whole thing lies clear before me."

"And what is the whole thing?"

He hesitated a moment. "You say your mother 's nervous. Ah, if you knew how nervous I am!"

"Well, I 'm not. Go on."

"Give it up — give it up!" stammered Sherringham.

"Give it up?" Miriam fixed him like a mild Medusa.

"I 'll marry you to-morrow if you 'll renounce; and in return for the sacrifice you make for me I 'll do more for you than ever was done for a woman before."

"Renounce, after to-night? Do you call that a plan?" asked Miriam. "Those are old words and very foolish ones: you wanted something of the sort a year ago."

"Oh, I fluttered round the idea then; we were talking in the air. I did n't really believe I could make you see it then, and certainly you did n't see it. My own future moreover was n't definite to me. I did n't know what I could offer you. But these last months have made a difference, and I do know now. Now what I say is deliberate, it 's deeply meditated. I simply can't live

without you, and I hold that together we may do great things."

"What sort of things?" Miriam inquired.

"The things of my profession — of my life — the things one does for one's country, the responsibility and the honor of great affairs; deeply fascinating when one's immersed in them, and more exciting than the excitements of the theatre. Care for me only a little and you'll see what they are, they'll take hold of you. Believe me, believe me," Sherringham pleaded, "every fibre of my being trembles in what I say to you."

"You admitted yesterday it would n't do," said Miriam. "Where were the fibres of your being then?"

"They trembled even more than now, and I was trying, like an ass, not to feel them. Where was this evening, yesterday — where were the maddening hours I've just spent? Ah, you're the perfection of perfections, and as I sat there to-night you taught me what I really want."

"The perfection of perfections?" the girl repeated interrogatively, with the strangest smile.

"I need n't try to tell you: you must have felt, to-night, with such rapture, what you are, what you can do. How can I give that up?" Sherringham asked.

"How can *I*, my poor friend? I like your plans and your responsibilities and your great affairs, as you call them. *Voyons*, they're infantile. I've just shown that I'm a perfection of perfec-

tions: therefore it 's just the moment to renounce, as you gracefully say? Oh, I was sure, I was sure!" And Miriam paused, resting solicitous, pitying eyes upon her visitor, as if she were trying to think of some arrangement that would help him out of his absurdity. "I was sure, I mean, that if you did come, your poor dear doting brain would be quite addled," she presently went on. "I can't be a muff, in public, just for you, *pourtant*. Dear me, why do you like us so much?"

"Like you? I loathe you!"

"Je le vois parbleu bien! I mean, why do you feel us, judge us, understand us so well? I please you because you see, because you know; and because I please you, you must adapt me to your convenience, you must take me over, as they say. You admire me as an artist, and therefore you wish to put me into a box in which the artist will breathe her last. Ah, be reasonable; you must let her live!"

"Let her live? As if I could prevent her living!" Peter cried, with unmistakable conviction. "Even if I wanted, how could I prevent a spirit like yours from expressing itself? Don't talk about my putting you in a box, for, dearest child, I 'm taking you out of one. The artist is irrepressible, eternal; she 'll be in everything you are and in everything you do, and you 'll go about with her triumphantly exerting your powers, charming the world, carrying everything before you."

Miriam's color rose, through her paint, at this

vivid picture, and she asked whimsically: "Shall you like that?"

"Like my wife to be the most brilliant woman in Europe? I think I can do with it."

"Are n't you afraid of me?"

"Not a bit."

"Bravely said. How little you know me, after all!" sighed the girl.

"I tell the truth," Peter went on; "and you must do me the justice to admit that I have taken the time to dig deep into my feelings. I 'm not an infatuated boy; I 've lived, I 've had experience, I 've observed; in short I know what I 'm about. It is n't a thing to reason about; it 's simply a need that consumes me. I 've put it on starvation diet, but it 's no use — really, it 's no use, Miriam," poor Sherringham pursued, with a soft quaver that betrayed all his sincerity. "It is n't a question of my trusting you; it 's simply a question of your trusting me. You 're all right, as I 've heard you say yourself; you 're frank, spontaneous, generous; you 're a magnificent creature. Just quietly marry me, and I 'll manage you."

"Manage me?" The girl's inflection was droll; it made Sherringham change color.

"I mean I 'll give you a larger life than the largest you can get in any other way. The stage is great, no doubt, but the world is greater. It 's a bigger theatre than any of those places in the Strand. We 'll go in for realities instead of

fables, and you'll do them far better than you do the fables."

Miriam had listened to him attentively, but her face showed her despair at his perverted ingenuity. "Excuse me for saying so, after your delightful tributes to my worth," she returned, in a moment, "but I've never listened to such a flood of determined sophistry. You think so well of me that humility itself ought to keep me silent; nevertheless, I *must* utter a few shabby words of sense. I'm a magnificent creature on the stage — well and good; it's what I want to be, and it's charming to see such evidence that I succeed. But off the stage — come, come; I should lose all my advantages. The fact is so patent that it seems to me I'm very good-natured even to discuss it with you."

"Are you on the stage now, pray? Ah, Miriam, if it were not for the respect I owe you!" her companion murmured.

"If it were not for that I should n't have come here to meet you. My talent is the thing that takes you: could there be a better proof than that it's to-night's exhibition of it that has settled you? It's indeed a misfortune that you're so sensitive to this particular kind of talent, since it plays such tricks with your power to see things as they are. Without it I should be a dull, ignorant, third-rate woman, and yet that's the fate you ask me to face and insanely pretend you are ready to face yourself."

"Without it — without it?" Sherringham cried. "Your own sophistry is infinitely worse than mine. I should like to see you without it for the fiftieth part of a second. What I ask you to give up is the dusty boards of the play-house and the flaring footlights, but not the very essence of your being. Your talent is yourself, and it 's because it 's yourself that I yearn for you. If it had been a thing you could leave behind by the easy dodge of stepping off the stage I would never have looked at you a second time. Don't talk to me as if I were a simpleton, with your false simplifications! You were made to charm and console, to represent beauty and harmony and variety to miserable human beings; and the daily life of man is the theatre for that — not a vulgar shop with a turnstile, that 's open only once in the twenty-four hours. Without it, verily!" Sherringham went on, with rising scorn and exasperated passion. "Please let me know the first time you 're without your face, without your voice, your step, your exquisite spirit, the turn of your head and the wonder of your eye!"

Miriam, at this, moved away from him with a port that resembled what she sometimes showed on the stage when she turned her young back upon the footlights and then, after a few steps, grandly swept round again. This evolution she performed (it was over in an instant) on the present occasion; even to stopping short with her eyes upon him and her head erect. "Surely

it 's strange," she said, "the way the other solution never occurs to you."

"The other solution?"

"That *you* should stay on the stage."

"I don't understand you," Sherringham confessed.

"Stay on *my* stage; come off your own."

Sherringham hesitated a moment. "You mean that if I 'll do that you 'll have me?"

"I mean that if it were to occur to you to offer me a little sacrifice on your own side, it might place the matter in a slightly more attractive light."

"Continue to let you act — as my wife?" Sherringham demanded. "Is it a real condition? Am I to understand that those are your terms?"

"I may say so without fear, because you 'll never accept them."

"Would *you* accept them, from me — accept the sacrifice, see me throw up my work, my prospects (of course I should have to do that), and simply become your appendage?"

"My dear fellow, you invite me with the best conscience in the world to become yours."

"The cases are not equal. You would make of me the husband of an actress. I should make of you the wife of an ambassador."

"The husband of an actress, *c'est bientôt dit*, in that tone of scorn! If you 're consistent," said Miriam, "it ought to be a proud position for you."

"What do you mean, if I 'm consistent?"

"Have n't you always insisted on the beauty and interest of our art and the greatness of our mission? Have n't you almost come to blows with poor Gabriel Nash about it? What did all that mean if you won't face the first consequences of your theory? Either it was an enlightened conviction or it was an empty pretense. If it was heartless humbug I 'm glad to know it," Miriam rolled out, with a darkening eye. "The better the cause, it seems to me, the better the deed; and if the theatre *is* important to the 'human spirit,' as you used to say so charmingly, and if, into the bargain, you have the pull of being so fond of me, I don't see why it should be monstrous to give us your services, in an intelligent indirect way. Of course if you 're not serious we need n't talk at all; but if you are, with your conception of what the actor can do, why is it so base to come to the actor's aid, taking one devotion with another? If I 'm so fine I 'm worth looking after a bit, and the place where I 'm finest is the place to look after me!"

"You were never finer than at this minute, in the deepest domesticity of private life," Sherringham returned. "I have no conception whatever of what the actor can do, and no theory whatever about the importance of the theatre. Any infatuation of that sort has completely quitted me, and for all I care the theatre may go to the dogs."

"You're dishonest, you're ungrateful, you're false!" Miriam flashed. "It was the theatre that brought you here; if it had n't been for the theatre I never would have looked at you. It was in the name of the theatre you first made love to me; it is to the theatre that you owe every advantage that, so far as I'm concerned, you possess."

"I seem to possess a great many!" groaned Sherringham.

"You might certainly make more of those you have! You make me angry, but I want to be fair," said the glowing girl, "and I can't be unless you will. You are not fair, nor candid, nor honorable, when you swallow your words and abjure your faith, when you throw over old friends and old memories for a selfish purpose."

"'Selfish purpose' is, in your own convenient idiom, *bientôt dit*," Sherringham answered. "I suppose you consider that if I truly esteemed you I should be ashamed to deprive the world of the light of your genius. Perhaps my esteem is n't of the right quality (there are different kinds, are n't there?). At any rate I've explained that I propose to deprive the world of nothing at all. You shall be celebrated, *allez!*"

"Rubbish — rubbish!" Miriam mocked, turning away again. "I know, of course," she added quickly, "that to befool yourself with such platitudes you must be pretty bad."

"Yes, I'm pretty bad," Sherringham admitted,

looking at her dismally. "What do you do with the declaration you made me the other day — the day I found my cousin here — that you'd take me if I should come to you as one who had risen high?"

Miriam reflected a moment. "I remember — the chaff about the orders, the stars and garters. My poor dear friend, don't be so painfully literal. Don't you know a joke when you see it? It was to worry your cousin, was n't it? But it did n't in the least succeed."

"Why should you wish to worry my cousin?"

"Because he 's so provoking. And surely I had my freedom no less than I have it now. Pray, what explanations should I have owed you and in what fear of you should I have gone? However, that has nothing to do with it. Say I did tell you that we might arrange it on the day that you should come to me covered with glory in the shape of little tinkling medals: why should you anticipate that transaction by so many years and knock me down such a long time in advance? Where is the glory, please, and where are the medals?"

"Dearest girl, am I not going to America (a capital promotion) next month," Sherringham argued, "and can't you trust me enough to believe that I speak with a real appreciation of the facts — that I 'm not lying to you, in short — when I tell you that I 've my foot in the stirrup? The glory 's dawning. *I* 'm all right, too."

"What you propose to me, then, is to accompany you *tout bonnement* to your new post."

"You put it in a nutshell," smiled Sherringham.

"You 're touching; it has its charm. But you can't get anything in America, you know. I 'm assured there are no medals to be picked up there. That 's why the diplomatic body hate it."

"It 's on the way — it 's on the way," Sherringham hammered, feverishly. "They don't keep us long in disagreeable places, unless we want to stay. There 's one thing you can get anywhere if you 're clever, and nowhere if you 're not, and in the disagreeable places, generally, more than in the others: and that (since it 's the element of the question we 're discussing) is simply success. It 's odious to be put on one's swagger, but I protest against being treated as if I had nothing to offer — to offer to a person who has such glories of her own. I 'm not a little presumptuous ass; I 'm a man accomplished and determined, and the omens are on my side." Peter faltered a moment, and then, with a queer expression, he went on: "Remember, after all, that, strictly speaking, your glories are also still in the future." An exclamation, at these words, burst from Miriam's lips, but her companion resumed quickly: "Ask my official superiors, ask any of my colleagues, if they consider that I 've nothing to offer."

Peter Sherringham had an idea, as he ceased speaking, that Miriam was on the point of breaking out with some strong word of resentment at his allusion to the contingent nature of her prospects. But it only twisted the weapon in his wound to hear her saying with extraordinary mildness, "It 's perfectly true that my glories are still to come, that I may fizzle out and that my little success of to-day is perhaps a mere flash in the pan. Stranger things have been — something of that sort happens every day. But don't we talk too much of that part of it?" she asked, with a weary tolerance that was noble in its effect. "Surely it 's vulgar to consider only the noise one 's going to make; especially when one remembers how unintelligent nine tenths of it will be. It is n't to my glories that I cling; it 's simply to my idea, even if it 's destined to sink me into obscurity. I like it better than anything else — a thousand times better (I 'm sorry to have to put it in such a way) than tossing up my head as the fine lady of a little coterie."

"A little coterie? I don't know what you 're talking about!" Peter retorted, with considerable heat.

"A big coterie, then! It 's only that, at the best. A nasty, prim 'official' woman, who is perched on her little local pedestal and thinks she 's a queen forever because she 's ridiculous for an hour! Oh, you need n't tell me. I 've seen them abroad, I could imitate them here. I could

do one for you on the spot, if I were not so tired. It 's scarcely worth mentioning, perhaps, but I 'm ready to drop." Miriam picked up the white mantle she had tossed off, flinging it round her with her usual amplitude of gesture. "They 're waiting for me, and I confess I 'm hungry. If I don't hurry they 'll eat up all the nice things. Don't say I have n't been obliging, and come back when you 're better. Good-night."

"I quite agree with you that we 've talked too much about the vulgar side of our question," Peter responded, walking round to get between her and the French window by which she apparently had a view of leaving the room. "That 's because I 've wanted to bribe you. Bribery is almost always vulgar."

"Yes, you should do better. *Merci!* There 's a cab: some of them have come for me. I must go," Miriam added, listening for a sound that reached her from the road.

Sherringham listened too, making out no cab. "Believe me, it is n't wise to turn your back on such an affection as mine and on such a confidence," he went on, speaking almost in a warning tone (there was a touch of superior sternness in it, as of a rebuke for real folly, but it was meant to be tender), and stopping her within a few feet of the window. "Such things are the most precious that life has to give us," he added, all but didactically.

Miriam had listened again for a moment; then

she appeared to give up the idea of the cab. The reader need hardly be told, at this stage of her youthful history, that the right way for her lover to soothe her was not to represent himself as acting for her highest good. "I like your calling it confidence," she presently said; and the deep note of the few words had something of the distant mutter of thunder.

"What is it, then, when I offer you everything I am, everything I have, everything I shall achieve?"

She seemed to measure him for a moment, as if she were thinking whether she should try to pass him. But she remained where she was and she returned: "I 'm sorry for you, yes, but I 'm also rather ashamed of you."

"Ashamed of me?"

"A brave offer to see me through — that 's what I should call confidence. You say to-day that you hate the theatre; and do you know what has made you do it? The fact that it has too large a place in your mind to let you repudiate it and throw it over with a good conscience. It has a deep fascination for you, and yet you 're not strong enough to make the concession of taking up with it publicly, in my person. You 're ashamed of yourself for that, as all your constant high claims for it are on record; so you blaspheme against it, to try and cover your retreat and your treachery and straighten out your personal situation. But it won't do, my dear fellow

— it won't do at all," Miriam proceeded, with a triumphant, almost judicial lucidity which made her companion stare; "you have n't the smallest excuse of stupidity, and your perversity is no excuse at all. Leave her alone altogether — a poor girl who 's making her way — or else come frankly to help her, to give her the benefit of your wisdom. Don't lock her up for life under the pretense of doing her good. What does one most good is to see a little honesty. You 're the best judge, the best critic, the best observer, the best *believer*, that I 've ever come across; you 're committed to it by everything you 've said to me for a twelvemonth, by the whole turn of your mind, by the way you 've followed up this business of ours. If an art is noble and beneficent, one should n't be afraid to offer it one's arm. Your cousin is n't: he can make sacrifices."

"My cousin?" shouted Peter. "Why, was n't it only the other day that you were throwing his sacrifices in his teeth?"

Under this imputation upon her consistency Miriam flinched but for an instant. "I did that to worry *you*," she smiled.

"Why should you wish to worry me if you care so little about me?"

"Care little about you? Have n't I told you often, did n't I tell you yesterday, how much I care? Ain't I showing it now by spending half the night here with you (giving myself away to all those cynics), taking all this trouble to per-

suade you to hold up your head and have the courage of your opinions?"

"You invent my opinions for your convenience," said Peter. "As long ago as the night I introduced you, in Paris, to Mademoiselle Voisin, you accused me of looking down on those who practice your art. I remember you almost scratched my eyes out because I didn't kotow enough to your friend Dashwood. Perhaps I didn't; but if already at that time I was so wide of the mark, you can scarcely accuse me of treachery now."

"I don't remember, but I dare say you're right," Miriam meditated. "What I accused you of then was probably simply what I reproach you with now: the germ, at least, of your deplorable weakness. You consider that we do awfully valuable work, and yet you wouldn't for the world let people suppose that you really take our side. If your position was even at that time so false, so much the worse for you, that's all. Oh, it's refreshing," the girl exclaimed, after a pause during which Sherringham seemed to himself to taste the full bitterness of despair, so baffled and derided he felt — "oh, it's refreshing to see a man burn his ships in a cause that appeals to him, give up something for it and break with hideous timidities and snobberies! It's the most beautiful sight in the world."

Sherringham, sore as he was, and angry, and exasperated, nevertheless burst out laughing at

this. "You 're magnificent, you give me at this moment the finest possible illustration of what you mean by burning one's ships. Verily, verily, there 's no one like you: talk of timidity, talk of refreshment! If I had any talent for it I 'd go on the stage to-morrow, to spend my life with you the better."

"If you 'll do that, I 'll be your wife the day after your first appearance. That would be really respectable," said Miriam.

"Unfortunately I 've no talent."

"That would only make it the more respectable."

"You 're just like Nick," Peter rejoined: "you 've taken to imitating Gabriel Nash. Don't you see that it 's only if it were a question of my going on the stage myself that there would be a certain fitness in your contrasting me invidiously with Nick Dormer and in my giving up one career for another? But simply to stand in the wing and hold your shawl and your smelling-bottle!" Peter concluded mournfully, as if he had ceased to debate.

"Holding my shawl and my smelling-bottle is a mere detail, representing a very small part of the various precious services, the protection and encouragement for which a woman in my position might be indebted to a man interested in her work and accomplished and determined, as you very justly describe yourself."

"And would it be your idea that such a man

should live on the money earned by an exhibition of the person of his still more accomplished and still more determined wife?"

"Why not, if they work together — if there 's something of his spirit and his support in everything she does?" Miriam demanded. "*Je vous attendais*, with the famous 'person;' of course that 's the great stick they beat us with. Yes, we show it for money, those of us who have anything to show, and some no doubt who have n't, which is the real scandal. What will you have? It 's only the envelope of the idea, it 's only our machinery, which ought to be conceded to us; and in proportion as the idea takes hold of us do we become unconscious of the clumsy body. Poor old 'person' — if you knew what *we* think of it! If you don't forget it, that 's your own affair: it shows that you 're dense before the idea."

"That I 'm dense?"

"I mean the public is — the public who pays us. After all, they expect us to look at them too, who are not half so well worth it. If you should see some of the creatures who have the face to plant themselves there in the stalls before one, for three mortal hours! I dare say it would be simpler to have no bodies, but we 're all in the same box, and it would be a great injustice to the idea, and we 're all showing ourselves, all the while; only some of us are not worth paying."

"You 're extraordinarily droll, but somehow I

can't laugh at you," said Peter, his handsome face lengthened to a point that sufficiently attested the fact. "Do you remember the second time I ever saw you — the day you recited at my place?" he abruptly inquired, a good deal as if he were drawing from his quiver an arrow which, if it was the last, was also one of the most pointed.

"Perfectly, and what an idiot I was, though it was only yesterday!"

"You expressed to me then a deep detestation of the sort of self-exposure to which the profession you were seeking to enter would commit you. If you compared yourself to a contortionist at a country fair I 'm only taking my cue from you."

"I don't know what I may have said then," replied Miriam, whose steady flight was not arrested by this ineffectual bolt; "I was, no doubt, already wonderful for talking of things I know nothing about. I was only on the brink of the stream and I perhaps thought the water colder than it is. One warms it a bit one 's self, when once one is in. Of course I 'm a contortionist and of course there 's a hateful side: but don't you see how that very fact puts a price on every compensation, on the help of those who are ready to insist on the *other* side, the grand one, and especially on the sympathy of the person who is ready to insist most and to keep before us the great thing, the element that makes up for everything?"

"The element?" Peter questioned with a vagueness which was pardonably exaggerated. "Do you mean your success?"

"I mean what you've so often been eloquent about," the girl returned, with an indulgent shrug — "the way we simply stir people's souls. Ah, there's where life can help us," she broke out, with a change of tone, "there's where human relations and affections can help us; love and faith and joy and suffering and experience — I don't know what to call 'em. They suggest things, they light them up and sanctify them, as you may say; they make them appear worth doing." She became radiant for a moment, as if with a splendid vision; then melting into still another accent, which seemed all nature and harmony, she proceeded: "I must tell you that in the matter of what we can do for each other I have a tremendously high ideal. I go in for closeness of union, for identity of interest. A true marriage, as they call it, must do one a lot of good!"

Sherringham stood there looking at her a minute, during which her eyes sustained the rummage of his gaze without a relenting gleam of the sense of cruelty or of paradox. With a passionate but inarticulate ejaculation he turned away from her and remained, on the edge of the window, his hands in his pockets, gazing defeatedly, doggedly, into the featureless night, into the little black garden which had nothing to give

him but a familiar smell of damp. The warm darkness had no relief for him, and Miriam's histrionic hardness flung him back against a fifth-rate world, against a bedimmed, star-punctured nature which had no consolation — the bleared, irresponsive eyes of the London heaven. For the brief space that he glared at these things he dumbly and helplessly raged. What he wanted was something that was not in *that* thick prospect. What was the meaning of this sudden offensive importunity of "art," this senseless mocking catch, like some irritating chorus of conspirators in a bad opera, in which Miriam's voice was so incongruously conjoined with Nick's and in which Biddy's sweet little pipe had not scrupled still more bewilderingly to mingle? Art be damned: what commission, after all, had he ever given it to better him or bother him? If the pointless groan in which Peter exhaled a part of his humiliation had been translated into words, these words would have been as heavily charged with the genuine British mistrust of the bothersome principle as if the poor fellow speaking them had never quitted his island. Several acquired perceptions had struck a deep root in him, but there was an immemorial compact formation which lay deeper still. He tried at the present hour to rest upon it spiritually, but found it inelastic; and at the very moment when he was most conscious of this absence of the rebound or of any tolerable ease his vision was solicited by

an object which, as he immediately guessed, could only add to the complication of things.

An undefined shape hovered before him in the garden, half-way between the gate and the house; it remained outside of the broad shaft of lamplight projected from the window. It wavered for a moment, after it had become aware of Peter's observation, and then whisked round the corner of the little villa. This characteristic movement so effectually dispelled the mystery (it could only be Mrs. Rooth who resorted to such conspicuous secrecies) that, to feel that the game was up and his interview over, Sherringham had no need of seeing the figure reappear, on second thoughts, and dodge about in the dusk with a vexatious sportive imbecility. Evidently Miriam's warning of a few minutes before had been founded: a cab had deposited her anxious mother at the garden-door. Mrs. Rooth had entered with precautions; she had approached the house and retreated; she had effaced herself — had peered and waited and listened. Maternal solicitude and muddled calculations had drawn her away from a festival as yet only imperfectly commemorative. The heroine of the occasion, of course, had been intolerably missed, so that the old woman had both obliged the company and quieted her own nerves by jumping insistently into a hansom and rattling up to St. John's Wood to reclaim the absentee. But if she had wished to be in time she had also desired not to

be abrupt, and would have been still more embarrassed to say what she aspired to promote than to phrase what she had proposed to hinder. She wanted to abstain tastefully, to interfere felicitously, and, more generally and justifiably (the small hours had come), to see what her young charges were doing. She would probably have gathered that they were quarreling, and she appeared now to be telegraphing to Sherringham to know if it were over. He took no notice of her signals, if signals they were; he only felt that before he made way for the odious old woman there was one faint little spark he might strike from Miriam's flint.

Without letting her guess that her mother was on the premises he turned again to his companion, half expecting that she would have taken her chance to regard their discussion as more than terminated and by the other egress flit away from him in silence. But she was still there; she was in the act of approaching him, with a manifest intention of kindness, and she looked indeed, to his surprise, like an angel of mercy.

"Don't let us part so disagreeably," she said, "with your trying to make me feel as if I were merely disobliging. It's no use talking — we only hurt each other. Let us hold our tongues, like decent people, and go about our business. It is n't as if you had n't any cure — when you have such a capital one. Try it, try it, my dear friend — you 'll see! I wish you the highest pro-

motion and the quickest — every success and every reward. When you 've got them all, some day, and I 've become a great swell too, we 'll meet on that solid basis and you 'll be glad I 've been nasty now."

"Surely before I leave you I 've a right to ask you this," Sherringham answered, holding fast in both his own the cool hand of farewell that she had finally tormented him with. "Are you ready to follow up by a definite promise your implied assurance that I have a remedy?"

"A definite promise?" Miriam benignly gazed, with the perfection of evasion. "I don't 'imply' that you have a remedy. I declare it on the housetops. That delightful girl — "

"I 'm not talking of any delightful girl but you!" Peter broke in with a voice which, as he afterwards learned, struck Mrs. Rooth's ears, in the garden, with affright. "I simply hold you, under pain of being convicted of the grossest prevarication, to the strict sense of what you said a quarter of an hour ago."

"Ah, I 've said so many things; one has to do that to get rid of you. You rather hurt my hand," she added, jerking it away in a manner that showed that if she was an angel of mercy her mercy was partly for herself.

"As I understand you, then, I may have some hope if I do renounce my profession?" Peter pursued. "If I break with everything, my prospects, my studies, my training, my emoluments,

my past and my future, the service of my country and the ambition of my life, and engage to take up instead the business of watching your interests so far as I may learn how and ministering to your triumphs so far as may in me lie — if after further reflection I decide to go through these preliminaries, have I your word that I may definitely look to you to reward me with your precious hand?"

"I don't think you have any right to put the question to me now," said Miriam with a promptitude partly produced, perhaps, by the clear-cut form Peter's solemn speech had given (it was a charm to hear it) to each item of his enumeration. "The case is so very contingent, so dependent on what you ingeniously call your further reflection. While you reserve yourself you ask me to commit myself. If it's a question of further reflection, why did you drag me up here? And then," she added, "I'm so far from wishing you to take any such monstrous step."

"Monstrous, you call it? Just now you said it would be sublime."

"Sublime, if it's done with spontaneity, with passion; ridiculous, if it's done after further reflection. As you said, perfectly, a while ago, it is n't a thing to reason about."

"Ah, what a help you'd be to me in diplomacy!" Sherringham cried. "Will you give me a year to consider?"

"Would you trust me for a year?"

"Why not, if I'm ready to trust you for life?"

"Oh, I should n't be free then, worse luck. And how much you seem to take for granted one must like you!"

"Remember that you've made a great point of your liking me. Would n't you do so still more if I were heroic?"

Miriam looked at him a moment. "I think I should pity you, in such a cause. Give it all to *her;* don't throw away a real happiness!"

"Ah, you can't back out of your position with a few vague and even rather impertinent words!" Sherringham declared. "You accuse me of swallowing my protestations, but you swallow yours. You've painted in heavenly colors the sacrifice I'm talking of, and now you must take the consequences."

"The consequences?"

"Why, my coming back in a year to square you."

"Ah, you're tiresome!" cried Miriam. "Come back when you like. I don't wonder you've grown desperate, but fancy *me*, then!" she added, looking past him at a new interlocutor.

"Yes, but if he'll square you!" Peter heard Mrs. Rooth's voice respond, conciliatingly, behind him. She had stolen up to the window now, she had passed the threshold, she was in the room, but her daughter had not been startled. "What is it he wants to do, dear?" she continued, to Miriam.

"To induce me to marry him if he 'll go upon the stage. He 'll practice over there, where he 's going, and then he 'll come back and appear. Is n't it too dreadful? Talk him out of it, stay with him, soothe him!" the girl hurried on. "You 'll find some drinks and some biscuits in the cupboard — keep him with you, pacify him, give him *his* little supper. Meanwhile, I 'll go to mine; I 'll take the brougham; don't follow!"

With these words Miriam bounded into the garden, and her white drapery shone for an instant in the darkness before she disappeared. Peter looked about him, to pick up his hat, and while he did so he heard the bang of the gate and the quick carriage getting into motion. Mrs. Rooth appeared to sway excitedly, for a moment, in opposed directions: that of the impulse to rush after Miriam and that of the extraordinary possibility to which the young lady had alluded. She seemed in doubt, but at a venture, detaining him with a maternal touch, she twinkled up at their visitor like an insinuating glow-worm.

"I 'm so glad you came."

"I 'm not. I 've got nothing by it," he said, finding his hat.

"Oh, it was so beautiful!" she coaxed.

"The play — yes, wonderful. I 'm afraid it 's too late for me to avail myself of the privilege your daughter offers me. Good-night."

"Oh, it 's a pity; won't you take *anything?*" asked Mrs. Rooth. "When I heard your voice

so high I was scared and hung back." But before he could reply she added, "Are you really thinking of the stage?"

"It comes to the same thing."

"Do you mean you 've proposed?"

"Oh, unmistakably."

"And what does she say?"

"Why, you heard: she says I 'm an ass."

"Ah, the little rascal!" laughed Mrs. Rooth. "Leave her to me. I 'll help you. But you *are* mad. Give up nothing — least of all your advantages."

"I won't give up your daughter," said Peter, reflecting that if this was cheap it was at any rate good enough for Mrs. Rooth. He mended it a little indeed by adding darkly: "But you can't make her take me."

"I can prevent her taking any one else."

"Oh, can you!" Peter ejaculated, with more skepticism than ceremony.

"You 'll see — you 'll see." He passed into the garden, but, after she had blown out the candles and drawn the window to, Mrs. Rooth went with him. "All you 've got to do is to be yourself — to be true to your fine position," she explained, as they proceeded. "Trust me with the rest — trust me and be quiet."

"How can one be quiet, after this magnificent evening?"

"Yes, but it 's just that!" panted the eager old woman. "It has launched her so, on this sea of

dangers, that to make up for the loss of the old security (don't you know?) we must take a still firmer hold."

"Ay, of what?" asked Sherringham, as Mrs. Rooth's comfort became vague while she stopped with him at the garden-door.

"Ah, you know: of the *real* life, of the true anchor!" Her hansom was waiting for her, and she added: "I kept it, you see; but a little extravagance, on the night one's fortune has come!"

Peter stared. Yes, there were people whose fortune had come; but he managed to stammer: "Are you following her again?"

"For you — for you!" And Mrs. Rooth clambered into the vehicle. From the seat, enticingly, she offered him the place beside her. "Won't you come too? I know he asked you." Peter declined with a quick gesture, and as he turned away he heard her call after him, to cheer him on his lonely walk: "I shall keep this up; I shall never lose sight of her!"

XLVII.

When Mrs. Dallow returned to London, just before London broke up, the fact was immediately known in Calcutta Gardens and was promptly communicated to Nick Dormer by his sister Bridget. He had learnt it in no other way — he had had no correspondence with Julia during her absence. He gathered that his mother and sisters were not ignorant of her whereabouts (he never mentioned her name to them); but as to this he was not sure whether the source of their information was the "Morning Post" or a casual letter received by the inscrutable Biddy. He knew that Biddy had some epistolary commerce with Julia, and he had an impression that Grace occasionally exchanged letters with Mrs. Gresham. Biddy, however, who, as he was well aware, was always studying what he would like, forbore to talk to him about the absent mistress of Harsh, beyond once dropping the remark that she had gone from Florence to Venice and was enjoying gondolas and sunsets too much to leave them. Nick's comment on this was that she was a happy woman to have such a go at Titian and Tintoret: as he spoke, and for some time afterwards, the sense of how he himself should enjoy

a similar "go" made him ache with ineffectual longing.

He had forbidden himself, for the present, to think of absence, not only because it would be inconvenient and expensive, but because it would be a kind of retreat from the enemy, a concession to difficulty. The enemy was no particular person and no particular body of persons: not his mother; not Mr. Carteret, who, as Nick heard from the doctor at Beauclere, lingered on, sinking and sinking till his vitality appeared to have the vertical depth of a gold-mine; not his pacified constituents, who had found a healthy diversion in returning another Liberal, wholly without Mrs. Dallow's aid (she had not participated even to the extent of a responsive telegram in the election); not his late colleagues in the House, nor the biting satirists of the newspapers, nor the brilliant women he took down at dinner-parties (there was only one sense in which he ever took them down), nor his friends, nor his foes, nor his private thoughts, nor the periodical phantom of his shocked father: it was simply the general awkwardness of his situation. This awkwardness was connected with the sense of responsibility that Gabriel Nash so greatly deprecated — ceasing to roam, of late, on purpose to miss as few scenes as possible of the drama, rapidly growing dull, alas, of his friend's destiny; but that compromising relation scarcely drew the soreness from it. The public flurry produced by Nick's collapse had only

been large enough to mark the flatness of his position when it was over. To have had a few jokes cracked audibly at one's expense was not an ordeal worth talking of; the hardest thing about it was merely that there had not been enough of them to yield a proportion of good ones. Nick had felt, in short, the benefit of living in an age and in a society where number and pressure have, for the individual figure, especially when it 's a zero, compensations almost equal to their cruelties.

No, the pinch, for our young man's conscience, after a few weeks had passed, was simply an acute mistrust of the superficiality of performance into which the desire to justify himself might hurry him. That desire was passionate as regards Julia Dallow; it was ardent also as regards his mother; and, to make it absolutely uncomfortable, it was complicated with the conviction that neither of them would recognize his justification even when she should see it. They probably could n't if they would, and very likely they would n't if they could. He assured himself, however, that this limitation would n't matter; it was their affair — his own was simply to have the right sort of thing to show. The work he was now attempting was not the right sort of thing; though doubtless Julia, for instance, would dislike it almost as much as if it were. The two portraits of Miriam, after the first exhilaration of his finding himself at large, filled him with no private glee: they were not in the direction in which, for

the present, he wished really to move. There were moments when he felt almost angry, though of course he held his tongue, when by the few persons who saw them they were pronounced wonderfully clever. That they were wonderfully clever was just the detestable thing in them, so active had that cleverness been in making them seem better than they were. There were people to whom he would have been ashamed to show them, and these were the people whom it would give him most pleasure some day to please. Not only had he many an hour of disgust with his actual work, but he thought he saw, as in an ugly revelation, that nature had cursed him with an odious facility and that the lesson of his life, the sternest and wholesomest, would be to keep out of the trap it had laid for him. He had fallen into this trap on the threshold, and he had only scrambled out with his honor. He had a talent for appearance, and that was the fatal thing; he had a damnable suppleness and a gift of immediate response, a readiness to oblige, that made him seem to take up causes which he really left lying, enabled him to learn enough about them in an hour to have all the air of having made them his own. Many people called them their own who had taken them in much less. He was too clever by half, since this pernicious overflow had been at the bottom of deep disappointments and heart-burnings. He had assumed a virtue and enjoyed assuming it, and the assumption had cheated his

father and his mother and his affianced wife and his rich benefactor and the candid burgesses of Harsh and the cynical reporters of the newspapers. His enthusiasms had been but young curiosity, his speeches had been young agility, his professions and adhesions had been like postage-stamps without glue: the head was all right, but they would n't stick. He stood ready now to wring the neck of the irrepressible vice which certainly would like nothing better than to get him into further trouble. His only real justification would be to turn patience (his own of course) inside out; yet if there should be a way to misread that recipe his humbugging genius could be trusted infallibly to discover it. Cheap and easy results would dangle before him, little amateurish conspicuities, helped by his history, at exhibitions; putting it in his power to triumph with a quick "What do you say to that?" over those he had wounded. The fear of this danger was corrosive; it poisoned even legitimate joys. If he should have a striking picture at the Academy next year, it would n't be a crime; yet he could n't help suspecting any conditions that would enable him to be striking so soon. In this way he felt quite enough how Gabriel Nash "had" him whenever he railed at his fever for proof, and how inferior as a productive force the desire to win over the ill-disposed might be to the principle of quiet growth. Nash had a foreign manner of lifting up his finger and waving it before him, as

if to put an end to everything, whenever it became, in conversation or discussion, to any extent a question whether any one would like anything.

It was presumably, in some degree at least, a due respect for the principle of quiet growth that kept Nick on the spot at present, made him stick fast to Rosedale Road and Calcutta Gardens and deny himself the simplifications of absence. Do what he would he could not despoil himself of the impression that the disagreeable was somehow connected with the salutary, and the "quiet" with the disagreeable, when stubbornly borne; so he resisted a hundred impulses to run away to Paris or to Florence, and the temptation to persuade himself by material motion that he was launched. He stayed in London because it seemed to him that there he was more conscious of what he had undertaken, and he had a horror of shirking that consciousness. One element in it indeed was the perception that he would have found no great convenience in a foreign journey, even had his judgment approved such a subterfuge. The stoppage of his supplies from Beauclere had now become an historic fact, with something of the majesty of its class about it: he had had time to see what a difference this would make in his life. His means were small and he had several old debts, the number of which, as he believed, loomed large to his mother's imagination. He could never tell her that she exaggerated, because he told her nothing of that sort

now: they had no intimate talk, for an impenetrable partition, a tall bristling hedge of untrimmed misconceptions, had sprung up between them. Poor Biddy had made a hole in it, through which she squeezed, from side to side, to keep up communications, at the cost of many rents and scratches; but Lady Agnes walked straight and stiff, never turning her head, never stopping to pluck the least little daisy of consolation. It was in this manner she wished to signify that she had accepted her wrongs. She draped herself in them as in a kind of Roman mantle, and she never looked so proud and wasted and handsome as now that her eyes rested only upon ruins.

Nick was extremely sorry for her, though he thought there was a dreadful want of grace in her never setting a foot in Rosedale Road (she mentioned his studio no more than if it had been a private gambling-house, or something worse); sorry because he was well aware that, for the hour, everything must appear to her to have crumbled. The luxury of Broadwood would have to crumble: his mind was very clear about that. Biddy's prospects had withered to the finest, dreariest dust, and Biddy indeed, taking a lesson from her brother's perversities, seemed little disposed to better a bad business. She professed the most peacemaking sentiments, but when it came really to doing something to brighten up the scene she showed herself portentously corrupted. After Peter Sherringham's heartless

flight she had wantonly slighted an excellent opportunity to repair her misfortune. Lady Agnes had reason to know, about the end of June, that young Mr. Grindon, the only son (the other children were girls) of an immensely rich industrial and political baronet in the north, was literally waiting for the faintest sign. This reason she promptly imparted to her younger daughter, whose intelligence had to take it in, but who had shown it no other consideration. Biddy had set her charming face as a stone; she would have nothing to do with signs, and she, practically speaking, willfully, wickedly refused a magnificent offer, so that the young man carried his noble expectations elsewhere. How much in earnest he had been was proved by the fact that, before Goodwood had come and gone, he was captured by Lady Muriel Macpherson. It was superfluous to insist on the frantic determination to get married revealed by such an accident as that. Nick knew of this episode only through Grace, and he deplored its having occurred in the midst of other disasters.

He knew, or he suspected, something more as well — something about his brother Percival which, if it should come to light, no season would be genial enough to gloss over. It had usually been supposed that Percy's store of comfort against the ills of life was confined to the infallibility of his rifle. He was not sensitive, but he had always the consolation of killing something.

It had suddenly come to Nick's ears, however, that he had another resource as well, in the person of a robust countrywoman, housed in an ivied corner of Warwickshire, in whom he had long been interested and whom, without any flourish of magnanimity, he had ended by making his wife. The situation of the latest born of the pledges of this affection, a blooming boy (there had been two or three previously), was therefore perfectly regular and of a nature to make a difference in the worldly position, as the phrase is, of his moneyless uncle. If there be degrees in the absolute and Percy had an heir (others, moreover, would supposably come), Nick would have to regard himself as still more moneyless than before. His brother's last step was doubtless, under the circumstances, to be commended; but such discoveries were enlivening only when they were made in other families, and Lady Agnes would scarcely enjoy learning to what tune she had become a grandmother.

Nick forbore, from delicacy, to intimate to Biddy that he thought it a pity she could n't care for Mr. Grindon; but he had a private sense that if she had been capable of such an achievement it would have lightened a little the weight he himself had to carry. He bore her a slight grudge, which lasted until Julia Dallow came back; when the circumstance of the girl's being summoned immediately down to Harsh created a diversion that was perhaps, after all, only fanci-

ful. Biddy, as we know, entertained a theory, which Nick had found occasion to combat, that Mrs. Dallow had not treated him perfectly well; therefore in going to Harsh the very first time Julia held out a hand to her, so jealous a little sister must have recognized a special inducement. The inducement might have been that Julia had comfort for her, that she was acting by the direct advice of this acute lady, that they were still in close communion on the question of the offers Biddy was not to accept, that in short Peter Sherringham's sister had taken upon herself to see that Biddy should remain free until the day of the fugitive's inevitable return. Once or twice, indeed, Nick wondered whether Mrs. Dallow herself was visited, in a larger sense, by the thought of retracing her steps — whether she wished to draw out her young friend's opinion as to how she might do so gracefully. During the few days she was in town Nick had seen her twice, in Great Stanhope Street, but not alone. She had said to him, on one of these occasions, in her odd, explosive way: "I should have thought you'd have gone away somewhere — it must be such a bore." Of course she firmly believed he was staying for Miriam, which he really was not; and probably she had written this false impression off to Peter, who, still more probably, would prefer to regard it as just. Nick was staying for Miriam only in the sense that he should be very glad of the money he might receive for the por-

trait he was engaged in painting, That money would be a great convenience to him, in spite of the obstructive ground Miriam had taken in pretending (she had blown half a gale about it) that he had had no right to dispose of such a production without her consent. His answer to this was simply that the purchaser was so little of a stranger that it did n't go, as it were, out of the family, out of hers. It did n't matter that Miriam should protest that if Mr. Sherringham had formerly been no stranger he was now utterly one, so that there could be nothing less soothing to him than to see her hated image on his wall. He would back out of the bargain, and Nick would be left with his work on his hands. Nick jeered at this shallow theory and, when she came to sit, the question served as well as another to sprinkle their familiar silences with chaff. Nick already knew something, as we have seen, of the conditions in which his distracted kinsman had left England; and this connected itself, in casual meditation, with some of the calculations that he attributed to Julia and Biddy. There had naturally been a sequel to the queer behavior in which Peter had indulged, at the theatre, on the eve of his departure — a sequel embodied in a remark dropped by Miriam in the course of the first sitting she gave Nick after her great night. "Fancy" — so this observation ran — "fancy the dear man finding time, in the press of all his last duties, to ask me to marry him!"

"He told me you had found time, in the press of all yours, to say you would," Nick replied. And this was pretty much all that had passed on the subject between them, save, of course, that Miriam immediately made it clear that Peter had grossly misinformed him. What had happened was that she had said she would do nothing of the sort. She professed a desire not to be confronted again with this trying theme, and Nick easily fell in with it, from a definite preference he now had not to handle that kind of subject with her. If Julia had false ideas about him, and if Peter had them too, his part of the business was to take the simplest course to establish that falsity. There were difficulties indeed attached even to the simplest course, but there would be a difficulty the less if, in conversation, one should forbear to meddle with the general suggestive topic of intimate unions. It is certain that in these days Nick cultivated the practice of forbearances for which he did not receive, for which perhaps he never would receive, due credit.

He had been convinced for some time that one of the next things he should hear would be that Mrs. Dallow had arranged to marry Mr. Macgeorge or some such leader of multitudes. He could think of that now, he found — think of it with resignation, even when Julia was before his eyes, looking so handsomely forgetful that her air had to be taken as referring still more to their original intimacy than to his comparatively super-

ficial offense. What made this accomplishment of his own remarkable was that there was something else he thought of quite as much — the fact that he had only to see her again to feel by how great a charm she had in the old days taken possession of him. This charm operated apparently in a very direct, primitive way: her presence diffused it and fully established it, but her absence left comparatively little of it behind. It dwelt in the very facts of her person — it was something that she happened physically to be; yet (considering that the question was of something very like loveliness) its envelope of associations, of memories and recurrences, had no great density. She packed it up and took it away with her, as if she had been a woman who had come to sell a set of laces. The laces were as wonderful as ever when they were taken out of the box, but to get another look at them you had to send for the woman. What was above all remarkable was that Miriam Rooth was much less irresistible to our young man than Mrs. Dallow could be when Mrs. Dallow was on the spot. He could paint Miriam, day after day, without any agitating blur of vision; in fact the more he saw of her the clearer grew the atmosphere through which she blazed, the more her richness became one with that of the flowering picture. There are reciprocities and special sympathies, in such relations; mysterious affinities they used to be called, divinations of private congruity. Nick had an unex-

pressed conviction that if, as he had often wanted and proposed, he had embarked with Mrs. Dallow in this particular quest of a great prize, disaster would have overtaken them on the deep waters. Even with the limited risk, indeed, disaster had come; but it was of a different kind, and it had the advantage for him that now she could n't reproach and accuse him as the cause of it — could n't do so at least on any ground he was obliged to recognize. She would never know how much he had cared for her, how much he cared for her still; inasmuch as the conclusive proof, for himself, was his conscious reluctance to care for another woman, which she positively misread. Some day he would doubtless try to do that; but such a day seemed as yet far off, and he had no spite, no vindictive impulse, to help him. The soreness that was mingled with his liberation, the sense of indignity even, as of a full cup suddenly dashed, by a blundering hand, from his lips, demanded certainly a balm; but it found it, for the time, in another passion, not in a rancorous exercise of the same — a passion strong enough to make him forget what a pity it was that he was not made to care for two women at once.

As soon as Mrs. Dallow returned to England he broke ground, to his mother, on the subject of her making Julia understand that she and the girls now regarded their occupancy of Broadwood as absolutely terminated. He had already, several weeks before, picked a little at this arid

tract, but in the interval the soil appeared to have formed again. It was disagreeable to him to impose such a renunciation on Lady Agnes, and it was especially disagreeable to have to phrase it and discuss it and perhaps insist upon it. He would have liked the whole business to be tacit — a little triumph of silent delicacy. But he found reasons to suspect that what in fact would be most tacit was Julia's certain endurance of any chance *in*delicacy. Lady Agnes had a theory that they had virtually — "practically," as she said — given up the place, so that there was no need of making a splash about it; but Nick discovered, in the course of a conversation with Biddy more rigorous perhaps than any to which he had ever subjected her, that none of their property had been removed from the delightful house — none of the things (there were ever so many things) that Lady Agnes had caused to be conveyed there when they took possession. Her ladyship was the proprietor of innumerable articles of furniture, relics and survivals of her former greatness, and moved about the world with a train of heterogeneous baggage; so that her quiet overflow into the spaciousness of Broadwood had had all the luxury of a final subsidence. What Nick had to propose to her now was a dreadful combination, a relapse into all the things she most hated — seaside lodgings, bald storehouses in the Marylebone Road, little London rooms crammed with things that caught the dirt

and made them stuffy. He was afraid he should really finish her, and he himself was surprised, in a degree, at his insistence. He would n't have supposed that he should have cared so much, but he found he did care intensely. He cared enough — it says everything — to explain to his mother that, practically, her retention of Broadwood would be the violation of an agreement. Julia had given them the place on the understanding that he was to marry her, and since he was not to marry her they had no right to keep the place. "Yes, you make the mess and *we* pay the penalty!" Lady Agnes flashed out; but this was the only overt protest that she made, except indeed to contend that their withdrawal would be an act ungracious and offensive to Julia. She looked as she had looked during the months that succeeded his father's death, but she gave a general grim assent to the proposition that, let Julia take it as she would, their own duty was unmistakably clear.

It was Grace who was the principal representative of the idea that Julia would be outraged by such a step; she never ceased to repeat that she had never heard of anything so "nasty." Nick would have expected this of Grace, but he felt rather deserted and betrayed when Biddy murmured to him that *she* knew — that there was really no need of their sacrificing their mother's comfort to a mere fancy. She intimated that if Nick would only consent to their going on with

Broadwood as if nothing had happened (or rather as if everything had happened), she would answer for Julia. For almost the first time in his life Nick disliked what Biddy said to him, and he gave her a sharp rejoinder, embodying the general opinion that they all had enough to do to answer for themselves. He remembered afterwards the way she looked at him, startled, even frightened, with rising tears, before turning away. He held that it would be time enough to judge how Julia would take it after they had thrown up the place; and he made it his duty to see that his mother should address to Mrs. Dallow, by letter, a formal notification of their retirement. Mrs. Dallow could protest then if she liked. Nick was aware that, in general, he was not practical; he could imagine why, from his early years, people should have joked him about it. But this time he was determined that his behavior should be founded on a rigid view of things as they were. He did n't see his mother's letter to Julia, but he knew that it went. He thought she would have been more loyal if she had shown it to him, though of course there could be but little question of loyalty now. That it had really been written, however, very much on the lines he dictated, was clear to him from the subsequent surprise which Lady Agnes's blankness did not prevent him from divining.

Julia answered her letter, but in unexpected terms: she had apparently neither resisted nor

protested; she had simply been very glad to get her house back again and had not accused any of them of nastiness. Nick saw no more of her letter than he had seen of his mother's, but he was able to say to Grace (to Lady Agnes he was studiously mute), "My poor child, you see, after all, that we have n't kicked up such a row." Grace shook her head and looked gloomy and deeply wise, replying that he had no cause to triumph — they were so far from having seen the end of it yet. Then he guessed that his mother had complied with his wish on the calculation that it would be a mere form, that Julia would entreat them not to be so fantastic, and that he would then, in the presence of her wounded surprise, consent to a quiet continuance, so much in the interest (the air of Broadwood had a purity!) of the health of all of them. But since Julia jumped at their relinquishment he had no chance to be mollified: he had only to persist in having been right.

At bottom, probably, he himself was a little surprised at her eagerness. Literally speaking, it was not perfectly graceful. He was sorry his mother had been so deceived, but he was sorrier still for Biddy's mistake — it showed she might be mistaken about other things. Nothing was left now but for Lady Agnes to say, as she did, substantially, whenever she saw him: "We are to prepare to spend the autumn at Worthing, then, or some other horrible place? I don't know

their names: it's the only thing we can afford." There was an implication in this that if he expected her to drag her girls about to country-houses, in a continuance of the fidgety effort to work them off, he must understand at once that she was now too weary and too sad and too sick. She had done her best for them, and it had all been vain and cruel, and now the poor creatures must look out for themselves. To the grossness of Biddy's misconduct she need n't refer, nor to the golden opportunity this young lady had forfeited by her odious treatment of Mr. Grindon. It was clear that this time Lady Agnes was incurably discouraged; so much so as to fail to glean the dimmest light from the fact that the girl was really making a long stay at Harsh. Biddy went to and fro two or three times and then, in August, fairly settled there; and what her mother mainly saw in her absence was the desire to keep out of the way of household reminders of her depravity. In fact, as it turned out, Lady Agnes and Grace, in the first days of August, gathered themselves together for another visit to the old lady who had been Sir Nicholas's godmother; after which they went somewhere else, so that the question of Worthing had not to be immediately faced.

Nick stayed on in London with a passion of work fairly humming in his ears; he was conscious, with joy, that for three or four months, in the empty Babylon, he would have generous

days. But toward the end of August he got a letter from Grace in which she spoke of her situation, and her mother's, in a manner that made him feel he ought to do something tactful. They were paying a third visit (he knew that in Calcutta Gardens lady's-maids had been to and fro with boxes, replenishments of wardrobes), and yet somehow the outlook for the autumn was dark. Grace did n't say it in so many words, but what he read between the lines was that they had no more invitations. What therefore was to become of them? People liked them well enough when Biddy was with them, but they did n't care for her mother and her, *tout pur*, and Biddy was cooped up indefinitely with Julia. This was not the manner in which Grace used to allude to her sister's happy visits to Mrs. Dallow, and the change of tone made Nick wince with a sense of all that had collapsed. Biddy was a little fish worth landing, in short, scantily as she seemed disposed to bite, and Grace's rude probity could admit that she herself was not.

Nick had an inspiration: by way of doing something tactful he went down to Brighton and took lodgings for the three ladies, for several weeks, the quietest and sunniest he could find. This he intended as a kindly surprise, a reminder of how he had his mother's comfort at heart, how he could exert himself and save her trouble. But he had no sooner concluded his bargain (it was a more costly one than he had at first calcu-

lated) than he was bewildered, as he privately phrased it quite "stumped," at learning that the three ladies were to pass the autumn at Broadwood with Julia. Mrs. Dallow had taken the place into familiar use again, and she was now correcting their former surprise at her crude concurrence (this was infinitely characteristic of Julia) by inviting them to share it with her. Nick wondered vaguely what she was "up to;" but when his mother treated herself to the fine irony of addressing him an elaborately humble inquiry as to whether he would consent to their accepting the merciful refuge (she repeated this expression three times), he replied that she might do exactly as she liked: he would only mention that he should not feel himself at liberty to come and see her at Broadwood. This condition proved, apparently, to Lady Agnes's mind, no hindrance, and she and her daughters were presently reinstalled in the very apartments they had learned to love. This time it was even better than before; they had still fewer expenses. The expenses were Nick's: he had to pay a forfeit to the landlady at Brighton for backing out of his contract. He said nothing to his mother about this bungled business — he was literally afraid; but an event that befell at the same moment reminded him afresh that it was not the time to choose to squander money. Mr. Carteret drew his last breath; quite painlessly it seemed, as the closing scene was described at Beauclere when

our young man went down to the funeral. Two or three weeks afterwards the contents of his will were made public in the "Illustrated London News," where it definitely appeared that he left a very large fortune, not a penny of which was to go to Nick. The provision for Mr. Chayter's declining years was very handsome.

XLVIII.

MIRIAM had mounted, at a bound, in her new part, several steps in the ladder of fame, and at the climax of the London season this fact was brought home to her from hour to hour. It produced a thousand solicitations and entanglements, so that she rapidly learned that to be celebrated takes up almost as much of one's own time as of other people's. Even though, as she boasted, she had reduced to a science the practice of "working" her mother (she made use of the good lady socially to the utmost, pushing her perpetually into the breach), there were many occasions on which it was represented to her that she could not be disobliging without damaging her cause. She made almost an income out of the photographers (their appreciation of her as a subject knew no bounds), and she supplied the newspapers with columns of irreducible copy. To the gentlemen who sought speech of her on behalf of these organs she poured forth, vindictively, floods of unscrupulous romance; she told them all different tales, and as her mother told them others more marvelous yet publicity was cleverly caught by rival versions, surpassing each other in authenticity. The whole case was

remarkable, was unique; for if the girl was advertised by the bewilderment of her readers, she seemed to every skeptic, when he went to see her, as fine as if he had discovered her for himself. She was still accommodating enough, however, from time to time, to find an hour to come and sit to Nick Dormer, and he helped himself further by going to her theatre whenever he could. He was conscious that Julia Dallow would probably hear of that and triumph with a fresh sense of how right she had been; but this reflection only made him sigh resignedly, so true it struck him as being that there are some things explanation can never better, can never touch.

Miriam brought Basil Dashwood once to see her portrait, and Basil, who commended it in general, directed his criticism mainly to two points — its not yet being finished and its not having gone into that year's Academy. The young actor was visibly fidgety: he felt the contagion of Miriam's rapid pace, the quick beat of her success, and, looking at everything now from the standpoint of that speculation, could scarcely contain his impatience at the painter's clumsy slowness. He thought the second picture much better than the other one, but somehow it ought, by that time, to be before the public. Having a great deal of familiar proverbial wisdom, he put forth with vehemence the idea that in every great crisis there is nothing like striking while the iron is hot. He even betrayed a sort of

impression that with a little good-will Nick might wind up the job and still get the Academy people to take him in. Basil knew some of them; he all but offered to speak to them — the case was so exceptional; he had no doubt he could get something done. Against the appropriation of the work by Peter Sherringham he explicitly and loudly protested, in spite of the homeliest recommendations of silence from Miriam; and it was, indeed, easy to guess how such an arrangement would interfere with his own conception of the eventual right place for the two portraits — the vestibule of the theatre, where every one going in and out would see them, suspended face to face and surrounded by photographs, artistically disposed, of the young actress in a variety of characters. Dashwood showed a largeness of view in the way he jumped to the conviction that, in this position, the pictures would really help to draw. Considering the virtue he attributed to Miriam the idea was exempt from narrow prejudice.

Moreover, though a trifle feverish, he was really genial; he repeated, more than once: "Yes, my dear sir, you 've done it this time." This was a favorite formula with him; when some allusion was made to the girl's success he greeted it also with a comfortable "This time she *has* done it." There was a hint of knowledge and far calculation in his tone. It appeared before he went that this time even he himself had done it — he

had taken up something that would really answer. He told Nick more about Miriam, more about her affairs at that moment, at least, than she herself had communicated, contributing strongly to our young man's impression that one by one every element of a great destiny was being dropped into her cup. Nick himself tasted of success vicariously for the hour. Miriam let Dashwood talk only to contradict him, and contradicted him only to show how indifferently she could do it. She treated him as if she had nothing more to learn about his folly, but as if it had taken intimate friendship to reveal to her the full extent of it. Nick did n't mind her intimate friendships, but he ended by disliking Dashwood, who irritated him — a circumstance in which poor Julia, if it had come to her knowledge, would doubtless have found a damning eloquence. Miriam was more pleased with herself than ever: she now made no scruple of admitting that she enjoyed all her advantages. She was beginning to have a fuller vision of how successful success could be; she took everything as it came — dined out every Sunday, and even went into the country till the Monday morning; she had a hundred distinguished names on her lips and wonderful tales about the people who were making up to her. She struck Nick as less serious than she had been hitherto, as making even an aggressive show of frivolity; but he was conscious of no obligation to reprehend her for it —

the less as he had a dim vision that some effect of that sort, some irritation of his curiosity, was what she desired to produce. She would perhaps have liked, for reasons best known to herself, to look as if she were throwing herself away, not being able to do anything else. He could n't talk to her as if he took an immense interest in her career, because in fact he did n't ; she remained to him, primarily and essentially, a pictorial object, with the nature of whose vicissitudes he was concerned (putting common charity and his personal good-nature, of course, aside) only so far as they had something to say in her face. How could he know, in advance, what twist of her life would say most ? so possible was it even that complete failure or some incalculable perversion would only make her, for his particular purpose, more magnificent.

After she had left him, at any rate, the day she came with Basil Dashwood, and still more on a later occasion, as he turned back to his work when he had put her into her carriage, the last time, for that year, that he saw her — after she had left him it occurred to him, in the light of her quick distinction, that there were mighty differences in the famous artistic life. Miriam was already in a glow of glory which moreover was probably but a faint spark in relation to the blaze to come ; and as he closed the door upon her and took up his palette to rub it with a dirty cloth the little room in which his own battle was

practically to be fought looked wofully cold and gray and mean. It was lonely, and yet it was peopled with unfriendly shadows (so thick he saw them gathering in winter twilights to come), the duller conditions, the longer patiences, the less immediate and less personal joys. His late beginning was there, and his wasted youth, the mistakes that would still bring forth children after their image, the sedentary solitude, the clumsy obscurity, the poor explanations, the foolishness that he foresaw in having to ask people to wait, and wait longer, and wait again, for a fruition which, to their sense at least, would be an anti-climax. He cared enough for it, whatever it would be, to feel that his pertinacity might enter into comparison even with such a productive force as Miriam's. This was, after all, in his bare studio, the most collective dim presence, the one that was most sociable to him as he sat there and that made it the right place however wrong it was — the sense that it was to the thing in itself he was attached. This was Miriam's case, but the contrast, which she showed him she also felt, was in the number of other things that she got with the thing in itself.

I hasten to add that our young man had hours when this fine substance struck him as requiring, for a complete appeal, no adjunct whatever — as being in its own splendor a summary of all adjuncts and apologies. I have related that the great collections, the National Gallery and the

Museum were sometimes rather a series of dead surfaces to him; but the sketch I have attempted of him will have been inadequate if it fails to suggest that there were other days when, as he strolled through them, he plucked right and left perfect nosegays of reassurance. Bent as he was on working in the modern, which spoke to him with a thousand voices, he judged it better for long periods not to haunt the earlier masters, whose conditions had been so different (later he came to see that it did n't matter much, especially if one did n't go); but he was liable to accidental deflections from this theory — liable in particular to want to take a look at one of the great portraits of the past. These were the things that were the most inspiring, in the sense that they were the things that, while generations, while worlds had come and gone, seemed most to survive and testify. As he stood before them sometimes the perfection of their survival struck him as the supreme eloquence, the reason that included all others, thanks to the language of art, the richest and most universal. Empires and systems and conquests had rolled over the globe and every kind of greatness had risen and passed away, but the beauty of the great pictures had known nothing of death or change, and the ages had only sweetened their freshness. The same faces, the same figures looked out at different centuries, knowing a deal the century did n't, and when they joined hands they made the inde-

structible thread on which the pearls of history were strung.

Miriam notified her artist that her theatre was to close on the 10th of August, immediately after which she was to start, with the company, on a tremendous tour of the provinces. They were to make a lot of money, but they were to have no holiday, and she did n't want one; she only wanted to keep at it and make the most of her limited opportunities for practice; inasmuch as, at that rate, playing but two parts a year (and such parts — she despised them!) she should n't have mastered the rudiments of her trade before decrepitude would compel her to lay it by. The first time she came to the studio after her visit with Dashwood she sprang up abruptly, at the end of half an hour, saying she could sit no more — she had had enough of it. She was visibly restless and preoccupied, and though Nick had not waited till now to discover that she had more moods than he had tints on his palette, he had never yet seen her fitfulness at this particular angle. It was a trifle unbecoming and he was ready to let her go. She looked round the place as if she were suddenly tired of it, and then she said mechanically, in a heartless London way, while she smoothed down her gloves, "So you 're just going to stay on?" After he had confessed that this was his dark purpose she continued in the same casual, talk-making manner: "I dare say it 's the best thing for you. You 're just going to grind, eh?"

"I see before me an eternity of grinding."

"All alone, by yourself, in this dull little hole? You *will* be conscientious, you *will* be virtuous."

"Oh, my solitude will be mitigated — I shall have models and people."

"What people — what models?" Miriam asked, before the glass, arranging her hat.

"Well, no one so good as you."

"That 's a prospect!" the girl laughed; "for all the good you 've got out of me!"

"You 're no judge of that quantity," said Nick, "and even I can't measure it just yet. Have I been rather a brute? I can easily believe it; I have n't talked to you — I have n't amused you as I might. The truth is, painting people is a very absorbing, exclusive occupation. You can't do much to them besides."

"Yes, it 's a cruel honor."

"Cruel — that 's too much," Nick objected.

"I mean it 's one you should n't confer on people you like, for when it 's over it 's over: it kills your interest in them and after you 've finished them you don't like them any more."

"Surely I like you," Nick returned, sitting tilted back, before his picture, with his hands in his pockets.

"We 've done very well: it 's something not to have quarreled," said Miriam, smiling at him now and seeming more in it. "I would n't have had you slight your work — I would n't have had you do it badly. But there 's no fear of that for

you," she went on. "You 're the real thing and the rare bird. I have n't lived with you this way without seeing that: you 're the sincere artist so much more than I. No, no, don't protest," she added, with one of her sudden fine transitions to a deeper tone. "You 'll do things that will hand on your name when my screeching is happily over. Only you do seem to me, I confess, rather high and dry here — I speak from the point of view of your comfort and of my personal interest in you. You strike me as kind of lonely, as the Americans say — rather cut off and isolated in your grandeur. Have n't you any *confrères* — fellow-artists and people of that sort? Don't they come near you?"

"I don't know them much, I 've always been afraid of them, and how can they take me seriously?"

"Well, I 've got *confrères*, and sometimes I wish I had n't! But does your sister never come near you any more, or is it only the fear of meeting me?"

Nick was aware that his mother had a theory that Biddy was constantly bundled home from Rosedale Road at the approach of improper persons: she was as angry at this as if she would n't have been more so if the child had been suffered to stay; but the explanation he gave his present visitor was nearer the truth. He reminded Miriam that he had already told her (he had been careful to do this, so as not to let it appear she

was avoided) that his sister was now most of the time in the country, staying with an hospitable relation.

"Oh, yes," the girl rejoined to this, "with Mr. Sherringham's sister, Mrs. — what's her name? I always forget it." And when Nick had pronounced the word with a reluctance he doubtless failed sufficiently to conceal (he hated to talk about Mrs. Dallow; he did n't know what business Miriam had with her), she exclaimed, "That 's the one — the beauty, the wonderful beauty. I shall never forget how handsome she looked the day she found me here. I don't in the least resemble her, but I should like to have a try at that type, some day, in a comedy of manners. But who will write me a comedy of manners? There it is! The trouble would be, no doubt, that I should push her *à la charge*."

Nick listened to these remarks in silence, saying to himself that if Miriam should have the bad taste (she seemed trembling on the brink of it) to make an allusion to what had passed between the lady in question and himself, he should dislike her utterly. It would show him she was a coarse creature, after all. Her good genius interposed, however as against this hard penalty, and she quickly, for the moment at least, whisked away from the topic, demanding, apropos of comrades and visitors, what had become of Gabriel Nash, whom she had not encountered for so many days.

"I think he's tired of me," said Nick; "he has n't been near me, either. But, after all, it's natural — he has seen me through."

"Seen you through? Why, you've only just begun."

"Precisely, and at bottom he does n't like to see me begin. He's afraid I'll do something."

"Do you mean he's jealous?"

"Not in the least, for from the moment one does anything one ceases to compete with him. It leaves him the field more clear. But that's just the discomfort, for him — he feels, as you said just now, kind of lonely; he feels rather abandoned and even, I think, a little betrayed. So far from being jealous he yearns for me and regrets me. The only thing he really takes seriously is to speculate and understand, to talk about the reasons and the essence of things: the people who do that are the highest. The applications, the consequences, the vulgar little effects, belong to a lower plane, to which one must doubtless be tolerant and indulgent, but which is after all an affair of comparative accidents and trifles. Indeed he'll probably tell me frankly, the next time I see him, that he can't but feel that to come down to the little questions of action — the little prudences and compromises and simplifications of practice — is for the superior person a really fatal descent. One may be inoffensive and even commendable after it, but one can scarcely pretend to be interesting. *Il en faut comme ça,*

but one does n't haunt them. He 'll do his best for me; he 'll come back again, but he 'll come back sad, and finally he 'll fade away altogether. He 'll go off to Granada, or somewhere."

"The simplifications of practice?" cried Miriam. "Why, they are just precisely the most blessed things on earth. What should we do without them?"

"What indeed?" Nick echoed. "But if we need them, it 's because we 're not superior persons. We 're awful Philistines."

"I 'll be one with *you*," the girl smiled. "Poor Nash is n't worth talking about. What was it but a little question of action when he preached to you, as I know he did, to give up your seat?"

"Yes, he has a weakness for giving up — he 'll go with you as far as that. But I 'm not giving up any more, you see. I 'm pegging away, and that 's gross."

"He 's an idiot — *n'en parlons plus!*" Miriam dropped, gathering up her parasol, but lingering.

"Ah, never for me! He helped me at a difficult time."

"You ought to be ashamed to confess it."

"Oh, you *are* a Philistine," said Nick.

"Certainly I am," Miriam returned, going toward the door, "if it makes me one to be sorry, awfully sorry and even rather angry, that I have n't before me a period of the same sort of unsociable pegging away that you have. For want of it I

shall never really be good. However, if you don't tell people I 've said so, they 'll never know. Your conditions are far better than mine and far more respectable: you can do as many things as you like, in patient obscurity, while I 'm pitchforked into the *mêlèe*, and into the most improbable fame, upon the back of a solitary *cheval de bataille*, a poor, broken-winded screw. I foresee that I shall be condemned for the greater part of the rest of my days (do you see that?) to play the stuff I 'm acting now. I 'm studying Juliet and I want awfully to do her, but really I 'm mortally afraid lest, if I should succeed, I should find myself in such a box. Perhaps they 'd want Juliet forever, instead of my present part. You see amid what delightful alternatives one moves. What I want most I never shall have had — five quiet years of hard, all-round work, in a perfect company, with a manager more perfect still, playing five hundred parts and never being heard of. I may be too particular, but that 's what I should have liked. I think I 'm disgusting, with my successful crudities. It 's discouraging; it makes one not care much what happens. What 's the use, in such an age, of being good?"

"Good? Your haughty claim is that you 're bad."

"I mean *good*, you know — there are other ways. Don't be stupid." And Nick's visitor tapped him — he was at the door with her — with her parasol.

"I scarcely know what to say to you, for certainly it 's your fault if you get on so fast."

"I 'm too clever — I 'm a humbug."

"That 's the way I used to be," said Nick.

Miriam rested her wonderful eyes on him ; then she turned them over the room, slowly, after which she attached them again, kindly, musingly, on his own. "Ah, the pride of that — the sense of purification! He 'used' to be forsooth! Poor me! Of course you 'll say : 'Look at the sort of thing I 've undertaken to produce, compared with what you have.' So it 's all right. Become great in the proper way and don't expose me." She glanced back once more into the studio, as if she were leaving it forever, and gave another last look at the unfinished canvas on the easel. She shook her head sadly. "Poor Mr. Sherringham — with *that!*" she murmured.

"Oh, I 'll finish it — it will be very decent," said Nick.

"Finish it by yourself?"

"Not necessarily. You 'll come back and sit when you return to London."

"Never, never, never again."

Nick stared. "Why, you 've made me the most profuse offers and promises."

"Yes, but they were made in ignorance, and I 've backed out of them. I 'm capricious too — *faites la part de ça.* I see it would n't do — I did n't know it then. We 're too far apart — I *am*, as you say, a Philistine." And as Nick pro-

tested with vehemence against this unscrupulous bad faith, she added, "You 'll find other models; paint Gabriel Nash."

"Gabriel Nash — as a substitute for you?"

"It will be a good way to get rid of him. Paint Mrs. Dallow, too," Miriam went on, as she passed out of the door which Nick had opened for her — "paint Mrs. Dallow, if you wish to eradicate the last possibility of a throb."

It was strange that since only a moment before Nick had been in a state of mind to which the superfluity of this reference would have been the clearest thing about it, he should now have been moved to receive it, quickly, naturally, irreflectively, with the question: "The last possibility? Do you mean in her or in me?"

"Oh, in you. I don't know anything about her."

"But that would n't be the effect," rejoined Nick, with the same supervening candor. "I believe that if she were to sit to me the usual law would be reversed."

"The usual law?"

"Which you cited awhile since and of which I recognized the general truth. In the case you speak of I should probably make a frightful picture."

"And fall in love with her again? Then, for God's sake, risk the daub!" Miriam laughed out, floating away to her victoria.

XLIX.

MIRIAM had guessed happily in saying to Nick that to offer to paint Gabriel Nash would be the way to get rid of him. It was with no such invidious purpose indeed that our young man proposed to his intermittent friend to sit; rather, as August was dusty in the London streets, he had too little hope that Nash would remain in town at such a time to oblige him. Nick had no wish to get rid of his private philosopher; he liked his philosophy, and though of course premeditated paradox was the light to read him by, yet he had frequently, in detail, an inspired unexpectedness. He remained, in Rosedale Road, the man in the world who had most the quality of company. All the other men of Nick's acquaintance, all his political friends, represented, often very communicatively, their own affairs, and their own affairs alone; which, when they did it well, was the most their host could ask them. But Nash had the rare distinction that he seemed somehow to stand for *his* affairs, the said host's, with an interest in them unaffected by the ordinary social limitations of capacity. This relegated him to the class of high luxuries, and Nick was well aware that we hold our luxuries by a fitful and precarious tenure.

If a friend without personal eagerness was one of the greatest of these, it would be evident to the simplest mind that by the law of distribution of earthly boons such a convenience should be expected to forfeit in duration what it displayed in intensity. He had never been without a suspicion that Nash was too good to last, though, for that matter, nothing had happened to confirm a vague apprehension that the particular way he would break up, or break down, would be by wishing to put Nick in relation with his other disciples.

That would practically amount to a catastrophe, Nick felt; for it was odd that one could both have a great kindness for him and not in the least, when it came to the point, yearn for a view of his belongings. His originality had always been that he appeared to have none; and if in the first instance he had introduced Nick to Miriam and her mother, that was an exception for which Peter Sherringham's interference had been in a great measure responsible. All the same, however, it was some time before Nick ceased to think it might eventually very well happen that to complete his education, as it were, Gabriel would wish him to foregather a little with minds formed by the same mystical influence. Nick had an instinct, in which there was no consciousness of detriment to Nash, that the pupils, perhaps even the imitators, of such a genius would be, as he mentally phrased it, something awful.

He could be sure, even Gabriel himself could be sure, of his own reservations, but how could either of them be sure of those of others? Imitation is a fortunate homage only in proportion as it is delicate, and there was an indefinable something in Nash's doctrine that would have been discredited by exaggeration or by zeal. Providence, happily, appeared to have spared it this exposure; so that, after months, Nick had to remind himself that his friend had never pressed upon his attention the least little group of fellow-mystics, nor offered to produce them for his edification. It scarcely mattered now that he was just the man to whom the superficial would attribute that sort of tail: it would probably have been hard, for example, to persuade Lady Agnes, or Julia Dallow, or Peter Sherringham, that he was not most at home in some dusky, untidy, dimly-imagined suburb of "culture," peopled by unpleasant phrasemongers who thought him a gentleman and who had no human use but to be held up in the comic press, which was probably restrained by decorum from touching upon the worst of their aberrations.

Nick, at any rate, never discovered his academy, nor the suburb in question; never caught from the impenetrable background of his life the least reverberation of flitting or flirting, the smallest æsthetic ululation. There were moments when he was even moved to a degree of pity by the silence that poor Gabriel's own faculty

of sound made around him — when at least it qualified with a slight poorness the mystery he could never wholly dissociate from him, the sense of the transient and occasional, the likeness to vapor or murmuring wind or shifting light. It was, for instance, a symbol of this unclassified condition, the lack of all position as a name in well-kept books, that Nick in point of fact had no idea where he lived, would not have known how to go and see him or send him a doctor if he had heard he was ill. He had never walked with him to any door of Gabriel's own, even to pause at the threshold, though indeed Nash had a club, the Anonymous, in some improbable square, of which Nick suspected him of being the only member — he had never heard of another — where it was vaguely understood that letters would some day or other find him. Fortunately it was not necessary to worry about him, so comfortably his whole aspect seemed to imply that he could never be ill. And this was not, perhaps, because his bloom was healthy, but because it was morbid, as if he had been universally inoculated.

He turned up in Rosedale Road one day, after Miriam had left London ; he had just come back from a fortnight in Brittany, where he had drawn unusual refreshment from the subtle sadness of the landscape. He was on his way somewhere else; he was going abroad for the autumn, but he was not particular what he did, professing that

he had returned to London on purpose to take one last superintending look at Nick. "It 's very nice, it 's very nice; yes, yes, I see," he remarked, giving a little general assenting sigh as his eyes wandered over the simple scene — a sigh which, to a suspicious ear, would have testified to an insidious reaction.

Nick's ear, as we know, was already suspicious; a fact which would sufficiently account for the expectant smile (it indicated the pleasant apprehension of a theory confirmed) with which he inquired: "Do you mean my pictures are nice?"

"Yes, yes, your pictures and the whole thing."

"The whole thing?"

"Your existence here, in this little remote independent corner of the great city. The disinterestedness of your attitude, the persistence of your effort, the piety, the beauty, in short the example of the whole spectacle."

Nick broke into a laugh. "How near to having had enough of me you must be when you talk of my example!" Nash changed color slightly at this; it was the first time in Nick's remembrance that he had given a sign of embarrassment. "*Vous allez me lâcher*, I see it coming; and who can blame you? — for I 've ceased to be in the least spectacular. I had my little hour; it was a great deal, for some people don't even have that. I 've given you your curious case, and I 've been generous; I made the drama last, for you, as long as I could. You 'll 'slope,'

my dear fellow, — you 'll quietly slope; and it will be all right and inevitable, though I shall miss you greatly at first. Who knows whether, without you, I should n't still have been representing Harsh, heaven help me? You rescued me; you converted me from a representative into an example — that 's a shade better. But don't I know where you must be when you 're reduced to praising my piety?"

"Don't turn me away," said Nash plaintively; "give me a cigarette."

"I shall never dream of turning you away; I shall cherish you till the latest possible hour. I 'm only trying to keep myself in tune with the logic of things. The proof of how I cling is that, precisely, I want you to sit to me."

"To sit to you?" Nick thought his visitor looked a little blank.

"Certainly, for after all it is n't much to ask. Here we are, and the hour is peculiarly propitious — long light days, with no one coming near me, so that I have plenty of time. I had a hope I should have some orders: my younger sister, whom you know and who is a great optimist, plied me with that vision. In fact, we invented together a charming sordid little theory that there might be rather a 'run' on me, from the chatter (such as it was) produced by my taking up this line. My sister struck out the idea that a good many of the pretty ladies would think me interesting, would want to be done. Perhaps

they do, but they 've controlled themselves, for I can't say the run has commenced. They have n't even come to look, but I dare say they don't yet quite take it in. Of course it 's a bad time, with every one out of town ; though you know they might send for me to come and do them at home. Perhaps they will, when they settle down. A portrait-tour of a dozen country-houses, for the autumn and winter — what do you say to that for a superior programme ? I know I excruciate you," Nick added, " but don't you see how it 's my interest to try how much you 'll still stand ? "

Gabriel puffed his cigarette with a serenity so perfect that it might have been assumed to falsify Nick's words. " Mrs. Dallow will send for you — *vous allez voir ça,*" he said in a moment, brushing aside all vagueness.

" She 'll send for me ? "

" To paint her portrait ; she 'll recapture you on that basis. She 'll get you down to one of the country-houses, and it will all go off as charmingly — with sketching in the morning, on days you can't hunt, and anything you like in the afternoon, and fifteen courses in the evening ; there 'll be bishops and ambassadors staying — as if you were a ' well-known ' awfully clever amateur. Take care, take care, for, fickle as you may think me, I can read the future : don't imagine you 've come to the end of me yet. Mrs. Dallow and your sister, of both of whom I speak with the greatest respect, are capable of hatch-

ing together the most conscientious, delightful plan for you. Your differences with the beautiful lady will be patched up and you 'll each come round a little and meet the other half-way. Mrs. Dallow will swallow your profession if you 'll swallow hers. She 'll put up with the palette if you 'll put up with the country-house. It will be a very unusual one in which you won't find a good north room where you can paint. You 'll go about with her and do all her friends, all the bishops and ambassadors, and you 'll eat your cake and have it, and every one, beginning with your wife, will forget there 's anything queer about you, and everything will be for the best in the best of worlds ; so that, together — you and she — you 'll become a great social institution and every one will think she has a delightful husband ; to say nothing, of course, of your having a delightful wife. Ah, my dear fellow, you turn pale, and with reason ! " Nash went on : " that 's to pay you for having tried to make me let you have it. You have it, then, there ! I may be a bore " — the emphasis of this, though a mere shade, testified to the first personal resentment Nick had ever heard his visitor express — " I may be a bore, but once in a while I strike a light, I make things out. Then I venture to repeat, ' Take care, take care.' If, as I say, I respect those ladies infinitely, it is because they will be acting according to the highest wisdom of their sex. That 's the sort of thing women

invent when they're exceptionally good and clever. When they're not they don't do so well; but it's not for want of trying. There's only one thing in the world that's better than their charm: it's their conscience. That indeed is a part of their charm. And when they club together, when they earnestly consider, as in the case we're supposing," Nash continued, "then the whole thing takes a lift; for it's no longer the conscience of the individual, it's that of the sex."

"You're so remarkable that, more than ever, I must paint you," Nick returned, "though I'm so agitated by your prophetic words that my hand trembles and I shall doubtless scarcely be able to hold my brush. Look how I rattle my easel trying to put it into position. I see it all there, just as you say it. Yes, it will be a droll day, and more modern than anything yet, when the conscience of women perceives objections to men's being in love with them. You talk of their goodness and cleverness, and it's much to the point. I don't know what else they themselves might do with these things, but I don't see what men can do with them but be fond of them."

"Oh, you'll do it — you'll do it!" cried Nash, brightly jubilant.

"What is it I shall do?"

"Exactly what I just said; if not next year, then the year after, or the year after that. You'll go half-way to meet her, and she'll drag you

about and pass you off. You 'll paint the bishops and become a social institution. That is, you will if you don't take great care."

"I shall, no doubt, and that 's why I cling to you. You must still look after me; don't melt away into a mere improbable reminiscence, a delightful symbolic fable — don't, if you can possibly help it. The trouble is, you see, that you can't really keep hold very tight, because at bottom it will amuse you much more to see me in another pickle than to find me simply jogging down the vista of the years on the straight course. Let me, at any rate, have some sort of sketch of you, as a kind of feather from the angel's wing or a photograph of the ghost, to prove to me in the future that you were once a solid, sociable fact, that I did n't invent you, launch you as a hoax. Of course I shall be able to say to myself that you can't have been a fable — otherwise you would have a moral; but that won't be enough, because I 'm not sure you won't have had one. Some day you 'll peep in here languidly and find me in such an attitude of piety — presenting my bent back to you as I niggle over some interminable botch — that I shall give cruelly on your nerves, and you 'll draw away, closing the door softly (for you 'll be gentle and considerate about it and spare me — you won't even make me look round), and steal off on tiptoe, never, never to return."

Gabriel consented to sit; he professed he

should enjoy it and be glad to give up for it his immediate Continental projects, so vague to Nick, so definite, apparently, to himself; and he came back three times for the purpose. Nick promised himself a great deal of interest from this experiment; for from the first hour he began to feel that really, as yet, compared to the scrutiny to which he now subjected him, he had never, with any intensity, looked at his friend. His impression had been that Nash had a head quite fine enough to be a challenge, and that as he sat there, day by day, all sorts of pleasant and paintable things would come out in his face. This impression was not falsified, but the whole problem became more complicated. It struck our young man that he had never *seen* his subject before, and yet, somehow, this revelation was not produced by the sense of actually seeing it. What was revealed was the difficulty — what he saw was the indefinite and the elusive. He had taken things for granted which literally were not there, and he found things there (except that he could n't catch them) which he had not hitherto counted in. This baffling effect, being eminently in Nash's line, might have been the result of his whimsical volition, had it not appeared to Nick, after a few hours of the job, that his sitter was not the one who enjoyed it most. He was uncomfortable, at first vaguely and then definitely so — silent, restless, gloomy, dim, as if, when it came to the test, it proved less of a pleasure to

him than he could have had an idea of in advance to be infinitely examined and handled, sounded and sifted. He had been willing to try it, in good faith; but frankly he did n't like it. He was not cross, but he was clearly unhappy, and Nick had never heard him say so little, seen him give so little.

Nick felt, accordingly, as if he had laid a trap for him; he asked himself if it were really fair. At the same time there was something fascinating in the oddity of such a relation between the subject and the artist, and Nick was disposed to go on until he should have to stop for very pity. He caught, eventually, a glimmer of the truth that lay at the bottom of this anomaly; guessed that what made his friend uncomfortable was simply the reversal, in such a combination, of his usual terms of intercourse. He was so accustomed to living upon irony and the interpretation of things that it was strange to him to be himself interpreted, and (as a gentleman who sits for his portrait is always liable to be) interpreted ironically. From being outside of the universe he was suddenly brought into it, and from the position of a free commentator and critic, a sort of amateurish editor of the whole affair, reduced to that of humble ingredient and contributor. It occurred afterwards to Nick that he had perhaps brought on a catastrophe by having happened to say to his companion, in the course of their disjointed pauses, and not only without any cruel

intention, but with an impulse of genuine solicitude: "But, my dear fellow, what will you do when you 're old?"

"Old? What do you call old?" Nash had replied bravely enough, but with another perceptible tinge of irritation. "Must I really inform you, at this time of day, that that term has no application to such a condition as mine? It only belongs to you wretched people who have the incurable superstition of 'doing;' it 's the ignoble collapse you prepare for yourselves when you cease to be able to do. For me there 'll be no collapse, no transition, no clumsy readjustment of attitude; for I shall only *be*, more and more, with all the accumulations of experience, the longer I live."

"Oh, I 'm not particular about the term," said Nick. "If you don't call it old, the ultimate state, call it weary — call it exhausted. The accumulations of experience are practically accumulations of fatigue."

"I don't know anything about weariness. I live freshly — it does n't fatigue me."

"Then you need never die," rejoined Nick.

"Certainly; I dare say I 'm eternal."

Nick laughed out at this — it would be such fine news to some people. But it was uttered with perfect gravity, and it might very well have been in the spirit of that gravity that Nash failed to observe his agreement to sit again the next day. The next and the next and the next passed, but he never came back.

True enough, punctuality was not important for a man who felt that he had the command of all time. Nevertheless, his disappearance, "without a trace," like a personage in a fairy-tale or a melodrama, made a considerable impression on his friend as the months went on; so that, though he had never before had the least difficulty about entering into the play of Gabriel's humor, Nick now recalled with a certain fanciful awe the unusual seriousness with which he had ranked himself among imperishable things. He wondered a little whether he had at last gone quite mad. He had never before had such a literal air, and he would have had to be mad to be so commonplace. Perhaps indeed he was acting only more than usual in his customary spirit — thoughtfully contributing, for Nick's enlivenment, a mystery to an horizon now grown unromantic. The mystery, at any rate, remained; another too came near being added to it. Nick had the prospect, for the future, of the harmless excitement of waiting to see when Nash would turn up, if ever, and the further diversion (it almost consoled him for the annoyance of being left with a second unfinished portrait on his hands) of imagining that the picture he had begun had a singular air of gradually fading from the canvas. He could n't catch it in the act, but he could have a suspicion, when he glanced at it, that the hand of time was rubbing it away little by little (for all the world as in some delicate Hawthorne tale), making the

surface indistinct and bare — bare of all resemblance to the model. Of course the moral of the Hawthorne tale would be that this personage would come back on the day when the last adumbration should have vanished.

L.

ONE day, toward the end of March of the following year, or in other words more than six months after the incident I have last had occasion to narrate, Bridget Dormer came into her brother's studio and greeted him with the effusion that accompanies a return from an absence. She had been staying at Broadwood — she had been staying at Harsh. She had various things to tell him about these episodes, about his mother, about Grace, about herself, and about Percy's having come, just before, over to Broadwood for two days; the longest visit with which, almost since they could remember, the head of the family had honored Lady Agnes. Nick noted, however, that it had apparently been taken as a great favor, and Biddy loyally testified to the fact that her elder brother was awfully jolly and that his presence had been a pretext for tremendous fun. Nick asked her what had passed about his marriage — what their mother had said to him.

"Oh, nothing," Biddy replied; and he had said nothing to Lady Agnes and not a word to herself. This partly explained, for Nick, the awful jollity and the tremendous fun — none but cheerful topics had been produced; but he questioned

his sister further, to a point which led her to say: "Oh, I dare say that before long she 'll write to her."

"Who 'll write to whom?"

"Mamma 'll write to his wife. I 'm sure he 'd like it. Of course we shall end by going to see her. He was awfully disappointed at what he found in Spain — he did n't find anything."

Biddy spoke of his disappointment almost with commiseration, for she was evidently inclined this morning to a fresh and kindly view of things. Nick could share her feeling only so far as was permitted by a recognition merely general of what his brother must have looked for. It might have been snipe and it might have been bristling boars. Biddy was indeed brief, at first, about everything, in spite of the two months that had intervened since their last meeting; for he saw in a few minutes that she had something behind — something that made her gay and that she wanted to come to quickly. Nick was vaguely vexed at her being, fresh from Broadwood, so gay as that; for (it was impossible to shut one's eyes to it) what had come to pass in practice in regard to that rural retreat was exactly what he had desired to avert. All winter, while it had been taken for granted that his mother and sisters were doing what he wished, they had been doing the precise contrary. He held Biddy perhaps least responsible, and there was no one he could exclusively blame. He washed his hands of the matter and

succeeded fairly well, for the most part, in forgetting that he was not pleased. Julia Dallow herself in fact appeared to have been the most active member of the little group united to make light of his scruples. There had been a formal restitution of the place, but the three ladies were there more than ever, with the slight difference that they were mainly there with its mistress. Mahomet had declined to go any more to the mountain, so the mountain had virtually gone to Mahomet.

After their long visit in the autumn Lady Agnes and her girls had come back to town; but they had gone down again for Christmas and Julia had taken this occasion to write to Nick that she hoped very much he would n't refuse them all his own company for just a little scrap of the supremely sociable time. Nick, after reflection, judged it best not to refuse, and he spent three days under Mrs. Dallow's roof. The "all" proved a great many people, for she had taken care to fill the house. She was a magnificent entertainer, and Nick had never seen her so splendid, so free-handed, so gracefully practical. She was a perfect mistress of the revels; she had organized something festive for every day and for every night. The Dormers were so much in it, as the phrase was, that after all their discomfiture their fortune seemed in an hour to have come back. There had been a moment when, in extemporized charades, Lady Agnes, an elderly figure being required, appeared on the point of un-

dertaking the part of the housekeeper at a castle, who, dropping her *h*'s, showed sheeplike tourists about; but she waived the opportunity in favor of her daughter Grace. Even Grace had a great success. Nick of course was in the charades and in everything, but Julia was not; she only invented, directed, led the applause. When nothing else was going on Nick "sketched" the whole company: they followed him about, they waylaid him on staircases, clamoring to be allowed to sit. He obliged them, so far as he could, all save Julia, who did n't clamor; and, growing rather red, he thought of Gabriel Nash while he bent over the paper. Early in the new year he went abroad for six weeks, but only as far as Paris. It was a new Paris for him then: a Paris of the Rue Bonaparte and three or four professional friends (he had more of these there than in London); a Paris of studios and studies and models, of researches and revelations, comparisons and contrasts, of strong impressions and long discussions and rather uncomfortable economies, small cafés and bad fires and the general sense of being twenty again.

While he was away his mother and sisters (Lady Agnes now sometimes wrote to him) returned to London for a month, and before he was again established in Rosedale Road they went back, for a third period, to Broadwood. After they had been there five days — and this was the salt of the whole dish — Julia took her-

self off to Harsh, leaving them in undisturbed possession. They had remained so; they would not come up to town till after Easter. The trick was played, and Biddy, as I have mentioned, was now very content. Her brother presently learned, however, that the reason of this was not wholly the success of the trick; unless indeed her further ground were only a continuation of it. She was not in London as a forerunner of her mother; she was not even as yet in Calcutta Gardens. She had come to spend a week with Florence Tressilian, who had lately taken the dearest little flat in a charming new place, just put up, on the other side of the Park, with all kinds of lifts and tubes and electricities. Florence had been awfully nice to her — she had been with them ever so long at Broadwood, while the flat was being painted and prepared — and mamma had then let her, let Biddy, promise to come to her, when everything was ready, so that they might have a kind of old maids' house-warming together. If Florence could do without a chaperon now (she had two latchkeys and went alone on the top of omnibuses, and her name was in the Red Book), she was enough of a duenna for another girl. Biddy alluded with sweet cynical eyes to the fine, happy stride she had thus taken in the direction of enlightened spinsterhood; and Nick hung his head, somewhat abashed and humiliated, for; modern as he had supposed himself, there were evidently currents more modern yet.

It so happened that on this particular morning Nick had drawn out of a corner his interrupted study of Gabriel Nash; for no purpose more definite (he had only been looking round the room in a rummaging spirit) than to see curiously how much or how little of it remained. It had become, to his apprehension, such a shadowy affair (he was sure of this, and it made him laugh) that it did n't seem worth putting away, and he left it leaning against a table as if it had been a blank canvas or a "preparation" to be painted over. In this attitude it attracted Biddy's attention, for to her, on a second glance, it had distinguishable features. She had not seen it before, and she asked whom it might represent, remarking also that she could almost guess, but not quite: she had known the original, but she could n't name him.

"Six months ago, for a few days, it represented Gabriel Nash," Nick replied. "But it is n't anybody or anything now."

"Six months ago? What 's the matter with it and why don't you go on?"

"What 's the matter with it is more than I can tell you. But I can't go on, because I 've lost my model."

Biddy stared an instant. "Is he dead?"

Her brother laughed out at the candid cheerfulness, hopefulness almost, with which this inquiry broke from her. "He 's only dead to me. He has gone away."

"Where has he gone?"

"I have n't the least idea."

"Why, have you quarreled?" Biddy asked.

"Quarreled? For what do you take us? Does the nightingale quarrel with the moon?"

"I need n't ask which of you is the moon," said Biddy.

"Of course I 'm the nightingale. But, more literally," Nick continued, "Nash has melted back into the elements — he is part of the ambient air." Then, as even with this literalness he saw that his sister was mystified, he added: "I have a notion he has gone to India and at the present moment is reclining on a bank of flowers in the vale of Cashmere."

Biddy was silent a minute, after which she dropped: "Julia will be glad — she dislikes him so."

"If she dislikes him, why should she be glad he 's in such a delightful situation?"

"I mean about his going away; she 'll be glad of that."

"My poor child, what has Julia to do with it?"

"She has more to do with things than you think," Biddy replied, with some eagerness; but she had no sooner uttered the words than she perceptibly blushed. Hereupon, to attenuate the foolishness of her blush (only it had the opposite effect), she added: "She thinks he has been a bad element in your life."

Nick shook his head, smiling. "She thinks, perhaps, but she does n't think enough; other-

wise, she would arrive at this better thought — that she knows nothing whatever about my life."

"Ah, Nick," the girl pleaded, with solemn eyes, "you don't imagine what an interest she takes in it. She has told me, many times — she has talked lots to me about it." Biddy paused, and then went on, with an anxious little smile shining through her gravity, as if she were trying, cautiously, how much her brother would take: She has a conviction that it was Mr. Nash who made trouble between you."

"My dear Biddy," Nick rejoined, "those are thoroughly second-rate ideas, the result of a perfectly superficial view. Excuse my possibly priggish tone, but they really attribute to Nash a part he's quite incapable of playing. He can neither make trouble nor take trouble; no trouble could ever either have come out of him or have gone into him. Moreover," our young man continued, "if Julia has talked to you so much about the matter there's no harm in my talking to you a little. When she threw me over in an hour it was on a perfectly definite occasion. That occasion was the presence in my studio of a dishevelled actress."

"Oh, Nick, she has not thrown you over!" Biddy protested. "She has not — I have proof."

Nick felt, at this direct denial, a certain stir of indignation, and he looked at his sister with momentary sternness. "Has she sent you here to tell me this? What do you mean by the proof?"

Biddy's eyes, at these questions, met her brother's with a strange expression, and for a few seconds, while she looked entreatingly into his own, she wavered there, with parted lips, vaguely stretching out her hands. The next minute she had burst into tears — she was sobbing on his breast. He said "Hallo!" and soothed her; but it was very quickly over. Then she told him what she meant by her "proof," and what she had had on her mind ever since she came into the room. It was a message from Julia, but not to say — not to say what he had asked her just before if she meant; though indeed Biddy, more familiar now, since her brother had had his arm round her, boldly expressed the hope that it might in the end come to the same thing. Julia simply wanted to know (she had instructed Biddy to sound him, discreetly) if Nick would undertake her portrait; and the girl wound up this experiment in "sounding" by the statement that their beautiful kinswoman was dying to sit.

"Dying to sit?" repeated Nick, whose turn it was, this time, to feel his color rise.

"Any time you like, after Easter, when she comes up to town. She wants a full-length, and your very best, your most splendid work."

Nick stared, not caring that he had blushed. "Is she serious?"

"Ah, Nick — serious!" Biddy reasoned tenderly. She came nearer to him, and he thought

she was going to weep again. He took her by the shoulders, looking into her eyes.

"It 's all right, if she knows *I* am. But why does n't she come like any one else? I don't refuse people!"

"Nick, dearest Nick!" she went on, with her eyes conscious and pleading. He looked into them intently — as well as she he could play at sounding — and for a moment, between these young persons, the air was lighted by the glimmer of mutual searchings and suppressed confessions. Nick read deep and then, suddenly releasing his sister, turned away. She did n't see his face in that movement, but an observer to whom it had been presented might have fancied that it denoted a foreboding which was not exactly a dread, yet was not exclusively a joy.

The first thing Nick made out in the room, when he could distinguish, was Gabriel Nash's portrait, which immediately filled him with an unreasoning resentment. He seized it and turned it about; he jammed it back into its corner, with its face against the wall. This bustling transaction might have served to carry off the embarrassment with which he had finally averted himself from Biddy. The embarrassment, however, was all his own; none of it was reflected in the way Biddy resumed, after a silence in which she had followed his disposal of the picture:

"If she 's so eager to come here (for it 's here

that she wants to sit, not in Great Stanhope Street — never !), how can she prove better that she does n't care a bit if she meets Miss Rooth ? "

" She won't meet Miss Rooth," Nick replied, rather dryly.

" Oh, I 'm sorry ! " said Biddy. She was as frank as if she had achieved a sort of victory over her companion ; and she seemed to regret the loss of a chance for Mrs. Dallow to show magnanimity. Her tone made her brother laugh, but she went on, with confidence : " She thought it was Mr. Nash who made Miss Rooth come."

" So he did, by the way," said Nick.

" Well, then, was n't that making trouble ? "

" I thought you admitted there was no harm in her being here."

" Yes, but he hoped there would be."

" Poor Nash's hopes ! " Nick laughed. " My dear child, it would take a cleverer head than you or me, or even Julia, who must have invented that wise theory, to say what they were. However, let us agree that even if they were perfectly devilish my good sense has been a match for them."

" Oh, Nick, that 's delightful ! " chanted Biddy. Then she added : " Do you mean she does n't come any more ? "

" The disheveled actress ? She has n't been near me for months."

" But she 's in London — she 's always acting ?

I 've been away so much I 've scarcely observed," Biddy explained, with a slight change of note.

"The same part, poor creature, for nearly a year. It appears that that 's success, in her profession. I saw her in the character several times last summer, but I have n't set foot in her theatre since."

Biddy was silent a moment; then she suggested, "Peter would n't have liked that."

"Oh, Peter's likes!" sighed Nick, at his easel, beginning to work.

"I mean her acting the same part for a year."

"I 'm sure I don't know; he has never written me a word."

"Nor me either," Biddy returned.

There was another short silence, during which Nick brushed at a panel. It was terminated by his presently saying: "There 's one thing, certainly, Peter *would* like — that is, simply to be here to-night. It 's a great night — another great night — for the disheveled one. She 's to act Juliet for the first time."

"Ah, how I should like to see her!" the girl cried.

Nick glanced at her; she sat watching him. "She has sent me a stall; I wish she had sent me two. I should have been delighted to take you."

"Don't you think you could get another?" asked Biddy.

"They must be in tremendous demand. But

who knows, after all?" Nick added, at the same moment, looking round. "Here's a chance — here's a quite extraordinary chance!"

His servant had opened the door and was ushering in a lady whose identity was indeed justly indicated in those words. "Miss Rooth!" the man announced; but he was caught up by a gentleman who came next and who exclaimed, laughing and with a gesture gracefully corrective: "No, no — no longer Miss Rooth!"

Miriam entered the place with her charming familiar grandeur, as she might have appeared, as she appeared every night, early in her first act, at the back of the stage, by the immemorial central door, presenting herself to the house, taking easy possession, repeating old movements, looking from one to the other of the actors before the footlights. The rich "Good-morning" that she threw into the air, holding out her right hand to Biddy Dormer and then giving her left to Nick (as she might have given it to her own brother), had nothing to tell of intervals or alienations. She struck Biddy as still more terrible, in her splendid practice, than when she had seen her before — the practice and the splendor had now something almost royal. The girl had had occasion to make her courtesy to majesties and highnesses, but the flutter those effigies produced was nothing to the way in which, at the approach of this young lady, the agitated air seemed to recognize something supreme. So the deep,

mild eyes that she bent upon Biddy were not soothing, though they were evidently intended to soothe. The girl wondered that Nick could have got so used to her (he joked at her as she came), and later in the day, still under the great impression of this incident, she even wondered that Peter could. It was true that Peter apparently had n't got used to her.

"You never came — you never came," said Miriam to Biddy, kindly, sadly; and Biddy, recognizing the allusion, the invitation to visit the actress at home, had to explain how much she had been absent from London and then even that her brother had n't proposed to take her. "Very true — he has n't come himself. What is he doing now?" Miriam asked, standing near Biddy but looking at Nick, who had immediately engaged in conversation with his other visitor, a gentleman whose face came back to the girl. She had seen this gentleman on the stage with Miss Rooth — that was it, the night Peter took her to the theatre with Florence Tressilian. Oh, that Nick would only do something of that sort now! This desire, quickened by the presence of the strange, expressive woman, by the way she scattered sweet syllables as if she were touching the piano-keys, combined with other things to make Biddy's head swin — other things too mingled to name, admiration and fear and dim divination and purposeless pride and curiosity and resistance, the impulse to go away and the deter-

mination not to go. The actress courted her with her voice (what was the matter with her and what did she want?), and Biddy tried in return to give an idea of what Nick was doing. Not succeeding very well, she was going to appeal to her brother, but Miriam stopped her, saying it did n't matter; besides, Dashwood was telling Nick something — something they wanted him to know. "We 're in a great excitement — he has taken a theatre," Miriam added.

"Taken a theatre?" Biddy was vague.

"We 're going to set up for ourselves. He 's going to do for me altogether. It has all been arranged only within a day or two. It remains to be seen how it will answer," Miriam smiled. Biddy murmured some friendly hope, and her interlocutress went on: "Do you know why I 've broken in here to-day, after a long absence — interrupting your poor brother, taking up his precious time? It 's because I 'm so nervous."

"About your first night?" Biddy risked.

"Do you know about that — are you coming?" Miriam asked quickly.

"No, I 'm not coming — I have n't a place."

"Will you come if I send you one?"

"Oh, but really, it 's too beautiful of you!" stammered the girl.

"You shall have a box; your brother shall bring you. You can't squeeze in a pin, I 'm told; but I 've kept a box, I 'll manage it. Only, if I do, you know, mind you come!" Miriam

exclaimed, in suppliance, resting her hand on Biddy's.

"Don't be afraid. And may I bring a friend — the friend with whom I 'm staying?"

Miriam looked at her. "Do you mean Mrs. Dallow?"

"No, no — Miss Tressilian. She puts me up, she has got a flat. Did you ever see a flat?" asked Biddy expansively. "My cousin 's not in London." Miriam replied that she might bring whom she liked, and Biddy broke out, to her brother, "Fancy what kindness, Nick: we 're to have a box to-night and you 're to take me!"

Nick turned to her, smiling, with an expression in his face which struck her even at the time as odd but which she understood when the sense of it recurred to her later. Mr. Dashwood interposed with the remark that it was all very well to talk about boxes, but that he did n't see where at that time of day any such luxury was to come from.

"You have n't kept one, as I told you?" Miriam demanded.

"As you told me, my dear? Tell the lamb to keep its tender mutton from the wolves!"

"You shall have one: we 'll arrange it," Miriam went on, to Biddy.

"Let me qualify that statement a little, Miss Dormer," said Basil Dashwood. "We 'll arrange it if it 's humanly possible."

"We 'll arrange it even if it 's inhumanly im-

possible — that 's just the point," Miriam declared to the girl. "Don't talk about trouble — what 's he meant for but to take it? *Cela s'annonce bien*, you see," she continued, to Nick: "does n't it look as if we should pull beautifully together?" And as he replied that he heartily congratulated her — he was immensely interested in what he had been told — she exclaimed, after resting her eyes on him a moment: "What will you have? It seemed simpler! It was clear there had to be some one." She explained further to Nick, what had led her to come in at that moment, while Dashwood approached Biddy with civil assurances that they would see, they would leave no stone unturned, though he would not have taken it upon himself to promise.

Miriam reminded Nick of the blessing he had been to her nearly a year before, on her other first night, when she was fidgety and impatient: how he had let her come and sit there for hours — helped her to possess her soul till the evening and keep out of harm's way. The case was the same at present, with the aggravation indeed that he would understand — Dashwood's nerves as well as her own: they were a great deal worse than hers. Everything was ready for Juliet; they had been rehearsing for five months (it had kept her from going mad, with the eternity of the other piece), and *he* had occurred to her again, in the last intolerable hours, as the friend in need, the salutary stop-gap, no matter how much

she bothered him. She should n't be turned out? Biddy broke away from Basil Dashwood: she must go, she must hurry off to Miss Tressilian with her news. Florence might make some other stupid engagement for the evening: she must be warned in time. The girl took a flushed, excited leave, after having received a renewal of Miriam's pledge and even heard her say to Nick that he must now give back the stall that had been sent him — they would be sure to have another use for it.

LI.

THAT night, at the theatre, in the box (the miracle had been wrought, the treasure was found), Nick Dormer pointed out to his two companions the stall he had relinquished, which was close in front — noting how oddly, during the whole of the first act, it remained vacant. The house was magnificent, the actress was magnificent. To describe again so famous an occasion (it has been described, repeatedly, by other reporters) is not in the compass of the closing words of a history already too sustained. It is enough to say that this great night marked an era in contemporary art, and that for those who had a spectator's share in it the word "triumph" acquired a new illustration. Miriam's Juliet was an exquisite image of young passion and young despair, expressed in the divinest, truest music that had ever poured from tragic lips. The great childish audience, gaping at her points, expanded there before her like a lap to catch flowers.

During the first interval our three friends in the box had plenty to talk about, and they were so occupied with it that for some time they failed to observe that a gentleman had at last come into the empty stall near the front. This discovery

was presently formulated by Miss Tressilian, in the cheerful exclamation: "Only fancy — there 's Mr. Sherringham!" This of course immediately became a high wonder — a wonder for Nick and Biddy, who had not heard of his return; and the marvel was increased by the fact that he gave no sign of looking for them or even at them. Having taken possession of his place he sat very still in it, staring straight before him at the curtain. His abrupt reappearance contained mystifying elements both for Biddy and for Nick, so that it was mainly Miss Tressilian who had freedom of mind to throw off the theory that he had come back that very hour — had arrived from a long journey. Could n't they see how strange he was and how brown, how burnt and how red, how tired and how worn? They all inspected him, though Biddy declined Miss Tressilian's glass; but he was evidently unconscious of observation, and finally Biddy, leaning back in her chair, dropped the fantastic words:

"He has come home to marry Juliet!"

Nick glanced at her; then he replied: "What a disaster — to make such a journey as that and to be late for the fair!"

"Late for the fair?"

"Why, she 's married — these three days. They did it very quietly; Miriam says because her mother hated it and hopes it won't be much known! All the same she 's Basil Dashwood's wedded wife — he has come in just in time to

take the receipts for Juliet. It 's a good thing, no doubt, for there are at least two fortunes to be made out of her, and he 'll give up the stage." Nick explained to Miss Tressilian, who had inquired, that the gentleman in question was the actor who was playing Mercutio, and he asked Biddy if she had not known that this was what they were telling him, in Rosedale Road, in the morning. She replied that she had not understood, and she sank considerably behind the drapery of the box. From this cover she was able to launch, creditably enough, the exclamation:

"Poor Peter!"

Nick got up and stood, looking at poor Peter. "He ought to come round and speak to us, but if he does n't see us I suppose he does n't." Nick quitted the box as if to go to the restored exile. I may add that as soon as he had done so Florence Tressilian bounded over to the dusky corner in which Biddy had nestled. What passed immediately between these young ladies need not concern us: it is sufficient to mention that two minutes later Miss Tressilian broke out:

"Look at him, dearest; he 's turning his head this way!"

"Thank you, I don't care to look at him," said Biddy; and she doubtless demeaned herself in the high spirit of these words. It nevertheless happened that directly afterwards she became aware that he had glanced at his watch, as if to judge how soon the curtain would rise again, and

then had jumped up and passed quickly out of his place. The curtain had risen again without his coming back and without Nick's reappearing in the box. Indeed by the time Nick slipped in a good deal of the third act was over; and even then, even when the curtain descended, Peter Sherringham had not returned. Nick sat down in silence, to watch the stage, to which the breathless attention of his companions seemed to be attached, though Biddy, after a moment, threw back at him a single quick look. At the end of the act they were all occupied with the recalls, the applause and the responsive loveliness of Juliet as she was led out (Mercutio had to give her up to Romeo), and even for a few minutes after the uproar had subsided nothing was said among the three. At last Nick began:

"It 's quite true, he has just arrived; he 's in Great Stanhope Street. They 've given him several weeks, to make up for the uncomfortable way they bundled him off (to arrive in time for some special business that had suddenly to be gone into) when he first went out: he tells me they promised that at the time. He got into Southampton only a few hours ago, rushed up by the first train he could catch and came off here without any dinner."

"Fancy!" said Miss Tressilian; while Biddy asked if Peter might be in good health and had been happy. Nick replied that he said it was a beastly place, but he appeared all right. He was

to be in England probably a month, he was awfully brown, he sent his love to Biddy. Miss Tressilian looked at his empty stall and was of the opinion that it would be more to the point for him to come in to see her.

"Oh, he 'll turn up; we had a goodish talk in the lobby, where he met me. I think he went out somewhere."

"How odd to come so many thousand miles for this, and then not to stay!" Biddy reflected.

"Did he come on purpose for this?" Miss Tressilian asked.

"Perhaps he 's gone out to get his dinner!" joked Biddy.

Her friend suggested that he might be behind the scenes, but Nick expressed a doubt of this; and Biddy asked her brother if he himself were not going round. At this moment the curtain rose; Nick said he would go in the next interval. As soon as it came he quitted the box, remaining absent while it lasted.

All this time, in the house, there was no sign of Peter. Nick reappeared only as the fourth act was beginning, and uttered no word to his companions till it was over. Then, after a further delay produced by renewed evidences of the actress's victory, he described his visit to the stage and the wonderful spectacle of Miriam on the field of battle. Miss Tressilian inquired if he had found Mr. Sherringham with her; to which he replied that, save across the footlights, she had not

seen him. At this a soft exclamation broke from Biddy:

"Poor Peter! Where is he, then?"

Nick hesitated a moment. "He's walking the streets."

"Walking the streets?"

"I don't know — I give it up!" Nick replied; and his tone, for some minutes, reduced his companions to silence. But a little later Biddy said:

"Was it for him, this morning, she wanted that place, when she asked you to give yours back?"

"For him, exactly. It's very odd that she just managed to keep it, for all the use he makes of it! She told me just now that she heard from him, at his post, a short time ago, to the effect that he had seen in a newspaper a statement she was going to do Juliet, and that he firmly intended, though the ways and means were not clear to him (his leave of absence hadn't yet come out, and he couldn't be sure when it would come), to be present on her first night: therefore she must do him the service to keep a seat for him. She thought this a speech rather in the air, so that in the midst of all her cares she took no particular pains about the matter. She had an idea she had really done with him for a long time. But this afternoon what does he do but telegraph to her from Southampton that he keeps his appointment and counts upon her for a stall? Unless she had got back mine she would n't have been able to accommodate him. When she was in

Rosedale Road this morning she had n't received his telegram ; but his promise, his threat, whatever it was, came back to her ; she had a sort of foreboding and thought that on the chance she had better have something ready. When she got home she found his telegram, and she told me that he was the first person she saw in the house, through her fright, when she came on in the second act. It appears she was terrified this time, and it lasted half through the play."

"She must be rather annoyed at his having gone away," Miss Tressilian observed.

"Annoyed? I 'm not so sure!" laughed Nick.

"Ah, here he comes back!" cried Biddy, behind her fan, as the absentee edged into his seat in time for the fifth act. He stood there a moment, first looking round the theatre ; then he turned his eyes upon the box occupied by his relatives, smiling and waving his hand.

"After that he 'll surely come and see you," said Miss Tressilian.

"We shall see him as we go out," Biddy replied : "he must lose no more time."

Nick looked at him with a glass ; then he exclaimed : "Well, I 'm glad he has pulled himself together!"

"Why, what 's the matter with him, since he was n't disappointed in his seat?" Miss Tressilian demanded.

"The matter with him is that a couple of hours ago he had a great shock."

"A great shock?"

"I may as well mention it at last," Nick went on. "I had to say something to him in the lobby there, when we met — something I was pretty sure he could n't like. I let him have it full in the face — it seemed to me better and wiser. I told him Juliet 's married."

"Did n't he know it?" asked Biddy, who, with her face raised, had listened in deep stillness to every word that fell from her brother.

"How should he have known it? It has only just happened, and they 've been so clever, for reasons of their own (those people move among a lot of considerations that are absolutely foreign to us), about keeping it out of the papers. They put in a lot of lies and they leave out the real things."

"You don't mean to say Mr. Sherringham wanted to *marry* her!" Miss Tressilian ejaculated.

"Don't ask me what he wanted — I dare say we shall never know. One thing is very certain: that he did n't like my news and that I sha'n't soon forget the look in his face as he turned away from me, slipping out into the street. He was too much upset — he could n't trust himself to come back; he had to walk about — he tried to walk it off."

"Let us hope that he has walked it off!"

"Ah, poor fellow — he could n't hold out to the end; he has had to come back and look at

her once more. He knows she 'll be these last scenes."

"Is he so much in love with h What difference does it make, with if she *is* mar — ?" But in this rash Tressilian suddenly checked herself.

"We shall probably never know h has been in love with her nor wha it makes. We shall never know c he came back for nor why he could out there any longer without reli he scrambled down here all but s the station, nor why, after all, for hours, he has been roaming the str does n't matter, for it 's none of o But I 'm sorry for him — she *is* go lime," Nick added. The curtain the tragic climax of the play.

Miriam Rooth was sublime; yet fided to the reader that during th scenes Bridget Dormer directed he the inspired actress than to a figur who sat with his own gaze fastened It may further be intimated that ringham, though he saw but a frag performance, read clear, at the last tense light of genius that this fra that even so, after all, he had bee for his formidable journey. The gre his infatuation subsided, leaving behi thing tolerably deep and pure. Th

ment was far from being immediate, but it was helped on, unexpectedly to him, it began to dawn, at least, the very next night he saw the play, when he sat through the whole of it. Then he felt somehow recalled to reality by the very perfection of the representation. He began to come back to it from a period of miserable madness. He had been baffled, he had got his answer; it must last him — that was plain. He did n't fully accept it the first week or the second; but he accepted it sooner than he would have supposed, had he known what it was to be when he paced at night, under the southern stars, the deck of the ship that was bringing him to England.

It had been, as we know, Miss Tressilian's view, and even Biddy's, that evening, that Peter Sherringham would join them as they left the theatre. This view, however, was not confirmed by the event, for the gentleman in question vanished utterly (disappointingly crude behavior on the part of a young diplomatist who had distinguished himself), before any one could put a hand on him. And he failed to make up for his crudity by coming to see any one the next day, or even the next. Indeed many days elapsed, and very little would have been known about him had it not been that, in the country, Mrs. Dallow knew. What Mrs. Dallow knew was eventually known to Biddy Dormer; and in this way it could be established in his favor that he had remained some extraordinarily small number of

days in London, had almost directly gone over to Paris to see his old chief. He came back from Paris — Biddy knew this not from Mrs. Dallow, but in a much more immediate way: she knew it by his pressing the little electric button at the door of Florence Tressilian's flat, one day when the good Florence was out and she herself was at home. He made on this occasion a very long visit. The good Florence knew it not much later, you may be sure (and how he had got their address from Nick), and she took an extravagant satisfaction in it. Mr. Sherringham had never been to see her — the like of her — in his life: therefore it was clear what had made him begin. When he had once begun he kept it up, and Miss Tressilian's satisfaction increased.

Good as she was, she could remember without the slightest relenting what Nick Dormer had repeated to them at the theatre about Peter's present post's being a beastly place. However, she was not bound to make a stand at this if persons more nearly concerned, Lady Agnes and the girl herself, did n't mind it. How little *they* minded it, and Grace and Julia Dallow and even Nick, was proved in the course of a meeting that took place at Harsh during the Easter holidays. Mrs. Dallow had a small and intimate party to celebrate her brother's betrothal. The two ladies came over from Broadwood; even Nick, for two days, went back to his old hunting-ground, and Miss Tressilian relinquished for as long a time

the delights of her newly arranged flat. Peter Sherringham obtained an extension of leave, so that he might go back to his legation with a wife. Fortunately, as it turned out, Biddy's ordeal, in the more or less torrid zone, was not cruelly prolonged, for the pair have already received a superior appointment. It is Lady Agnes's proud opinion that her daughter is even now shaping their destiny. I say "even now," for these facts bring me very close to contemporary history. During those two days at Harsh Nick arranged with Julia Dallow the conditions, as they might be called, under which she should sit to him; and every one will remember in how recent an exhibition general attention was attracted, as the newspapers said in describing the private view, to the noble portrait of a lady which was the final outcome of that arrangement. Gabriel Nash had been at many a private view, but he was not at that one.

These matters are highly recent, however, as I say; so that in glancing about the little circle of the interests I have tried to evoke I am suddenly warned by a sharp sense of modernness. This renders it difficult to me, for example, in taking leave of our wonderful Miriam, to do much more than allude to the general impression that her remarkable career is even yet only in its early prime. Basil Dashwood has got his theatre, and his wife (people know now she *is* his wife) has added three or four new parts to her reper-

tory; but every one is agreed that both in public and in private she has a great deal more to show. This is equally true of Nick Dormer, in regard to whom I may finally say that his friend Nash's predictions about his reunion with Mrs. Dallow have not up to this time been justified. On the other hand, I must not omit to add, this lady has not, at the latest accounts, married Mr. Macgeorge. It is very true there has been a rumor that Mr. Macgeorge is worried about her — has even ceased to believe in her.

THE END.

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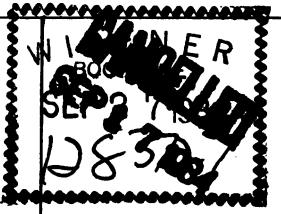

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